



# Frederick William Stevens MBE

Radio and aviation pioneer



Compiled by Matthew Stevens



## Foreword

Fred Stevens was an adventurer and a pioneer. We are fortunate that he wrote his memoirs in 1965–1966, especially as he typed them, which is not bad for a kid who didn't go to school. We are more fortunate that so much of his papers and photographs remain, as his widow, Nance, burned a lot of his papers when he died. We can be grateful to his third son, Ian, for preserving the papers and photos included here. I am grateful also to my late father, George, Fred's second son, for gathering all of the materials into one location and sourcing Fred's service records. And I am indebted to Sam Dellit, a radio historian who has dedicated himself to documenting the history of radio in Australia, for retrieving so much published material concering Fred from official records and making it available on Wikibooks.

Fred never mentions either of his two wives or any of this three sons, and mentions his family of origin only in passing. So learning anything about his personal life has been almost impossible.

Matthew Stevens, Thornleigh NSW, October 2019

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## Preface

Frederick William Stevens MBE lived for the first 16 years of his life with his mum and dad, who was a lighthouse keeper in the isolation of the Victorian coast. It was in this period that he honed his skills in Morse code and celestial navigation. This qualified him as a junior wireless operator on the troop ship *SS Wiltshire* in 1917. He later became Chief Engineer of the Brisbane wireless station 4QG.

In March 1929, Messrs Hitchcock and Anderson went missing in their search for the also missing Kingsford Smith. The Hitchcock and Anderson aircraft was a Westland III named *Kookaburra*, and was ill equipped and very poorly provisioned for a desert search. The Defence Department sent out three Air Force aircraft, and Qantas was asked to assist in the search for Anderson and Hitchcock, and Lester Brain of Qantas was commissioned. Brain telephoned Fred at home in Brisbane one evening and asked him to install a radio in the DH50J aircraft *Atalanta*. At that time, radios in aircraft were almost unheard of, and in the elapsed time of only one day and night, Fred rose to the task of building, installing and testing a simple continuous wave transmitter and receiver to be powered by a wind-driven generator mounted on the aircraft's port upper-wing leading edge.

Brain, Fred and engineer E. H. Compston set out from Archerfield Aerodrome on 19 April 1929 for the Northern Territory. After a number of abortive forays, on 21 April, about 80 miles south-east of Wave Hill, they saw smoke, and upon a closer inspection found the *Kookaburra*. Fred radioed the find back to Brisbane, then took photos with his Brownie camera of the stranded *Kookaburra* with Hitchcock's body lying under the starboard wing. The photos which Fred took were front page news in a Sydney newspaper a few days later. (Two of these original photos are held by Fred's grandson Matthew.)

Having experienced the excitement of flying, Fred decided early in 1930 that he should learn to fly. He was trained by Brain, among others, and did his first solo in the DH60 Moth VH-UAV on 13 March 1930. On 26 June 1930 he was awarded a private pilot's licence, number 552, authorising him to fly DH60s. Not content with this, Fred did further work, including stalls, forced landings, night flying, cloud flying and spins. Then on 19 November 1934 he was awarded a commercial pilot's licence, number 476, authorising him to fly DH60s, DH80s and DH86s.

Fred joined Qantas in December 1934 and spent the next 3½ years flying around the world, mostly to and from Singapore, but also to the UK and the USA.

In 1937 Fred joined the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) as a Communications Officer, spending some time in New Guinea in liaison with opposite numbers in the US Air Force. In 1942, being in the RAN Volunteer Reserve, he was called up to serve in the RAAF, and spent much of his time in New Guinea. After discharge from the RAAF in 1945, Fred returned to DCA, becoming Superintendent of Airways Operations, from where retired in 1963.

As well as a pilot, Fred was also a certificated Air Navigator and an Aircraft Radio Telegraph Operator and Radio Engineer. In 1963, Fred was awarded the MBE for services to civil aviation. For a man who had no formal schooling during his first 15 years of life in lighthouses, Fred was quite an achiever.

In his book *Qantas at War*, Hudson Fysh mentions Fred favourably on pages 7, 17 and 26.

George Stevens, Berowra Heights NSW, 2007



## Timeline

- 1898 Born 3 January at Spencer Crescent, Camberwell, Victoria. Lived with parents in lighthouse Cape Nelson
- 1899 1 May moved with parents to Camberwell
- 1900 8 July moved with parents to lighthouse Point Lonsdale
- 1903 13 January moved with parents to lighthouse Cape Nelson
- 1906 19 May moved with parents to lighthouse Split Point
- 1908 8 January moved with parents to lighthouse Wilsons Promontory
- 1910 8 April moved with parents to lighthouse Point Lonsdale
- 1912 17 April moved with parents to lighthouse Cape Schanck; 9 November passed Commonwealth Public Service exam No. 397 for appointment as Telegraph Messenger, but weak in arithmetic
- 1913 5 April passed Commonwealth Public Service exam No. 445 for appointment as Telegraph Messenger, but still weak in arithmetic; 2 August passed Commonwealth Public Service exam No. 468 for appointment as Telegraph Messenger, but *still* weak in arithmetic
- 1914 2 May passed Commonwealth Public Service exam No. 506 for appointment as Telegraph Messenger; June began first job with PMG as telegraph messenger at Dromana
- 1916 Transferred to Flinders then to Woomelang then back to Flinders
- 1917 25 January awarded provisional Certificate of Competency in Radiotelegraphy (RAN) number 41; 12 May – 21 December served aboard HMAS *Wiltshire* as Wireless Operator; 22 December engaged in RAN as CPO Telegraphist at HMAS *Cerberus*
- 1918 25 January granted RAN provisional Certificate of Proficiency in Radiotelegraphy; 17 March left *Cerberus*; 18 March appointed as CPO Telegraphist on Samarai Island, territory of Papua, New Guinea
- 1919 Samarai
- 1920 28 October transferred from RAN to PMG Department, still on Samarai
- 1921 April engaged to Cecily Woodfull Pescott
- 1922 12 July awarded WWI Mercantile Marine Medal; Oct sent to Willis Island meteorological station, 7 months
- 1923 May, returned from Willis Is; 14 May married Cecily; 6 September gained Certificate of Proficiency in Radiotelegraphy; Dec appointed to 2FC Sydney
- 1924 Assistant Engineer, 3LO Melbourne; September helped AWA with broadcast; 9 October son Richard William Stevens born
- 1925 1 May appointed to 4QG Brisbane; 27 July opened 4QG as Chief Engineer in 3 weeks
- 1928 15 August appointed to RAN Volunteer Reserve; 28 December awarded WWI British War Medal
- 1929 10 February son George Woodfull Stevens born; 21 April, with Lester Brain, found lost aircraft *Kookaburra*; commenced flying lessons
- 1930 17 May, qualified as a private pilot at Queensland Aero Club; 20 November awarded Commercial Operator's Certificate of Proficiency in Radiotelegraphy and Radiotelephony First Class
- 1931 June joined King and King Ltd in charge of radio installations; Dec joined 4BH
- 1934 13 July Queensland Aero Club licence; commercial pilot's licence; radio operator's licence; navigation licence; December commenced employment with Qantas as Senior First Officer and Wireless Operator Mechanic
- 1935 22 Feb, first Australian air mail service (Darwin–Singapore) on 10-seater DH86 (with Sir Edward Compston as passenger); 26 Feb, first return journey (Singapore–Darwin).
- 1936 1 June appointed reserve Pilot Officer RAAF
- 1937 20 July resigned from Qantas; 16 August Radio Inspector, Department of Civil Aviation (DCA)
- 1940 7 February permanent appointment as Radio Inspector, 3rd Div, DCA, Archerfield
- 1941 28 August USA non-resident visa granted; 17 October crew member with Lester Brain and P. G. Taylor flying Catalina flying boat from San Diego, California, to Sydney
- 1942 23 July appointed Flight Officer with RAAF; served in Port Moresby
- 1943 Served in Brisbane





- 1944 2 May divorced Cecily; 1 July promoted to Flight Lieutenant, RAAF; served in Townsville, Mer-  
auke, Horn Island, Cairns, Milne Bay, Goode-  
nough, Port Moresby
- 1945 7 April married Nancy Alumward Sim; served in  
Morotai and Melbourne; 25 September released  
from RAAF and returned to DCA
- 1947 27 July son Ian Bruce Stevens born
- 1948 7 December promoted to Superintendent, Air-  
ways Operations, Queensland District
- 1955 27 September temporary transfer to HO Sydney  
as Superintendent of Communications (DCA)
- 1963 1 January awarded MBE; 1 January retired from  
DCA
- 1964 Joined RACV in the Touring Records Section
- 1966 5 October died of a second heart attack

### Notable achievements

1. Holder of the first-issued 1st Class Aircraft  
Operator's Certificate of Proficiency in Wireless  
Telegraphy.
2. Opened broadcast station 4QG as Chief Engi-  
neer with J. W. Robinson as Manager in 1925.
3. Found the missing aircraft the *Kookaburra* on 21  
April 1929 in plane piloted by Lester Brain.
4. Crew member on the delivery flight of a PBY5  
Consolidated Flying Boat A24-18 AFS, which  
left Honolulu on 17 October 1941 on its  
delivery flight, with Lester Brain as commander  
and P. G. Taylor as navigator. The aircraft flew  
non-stop from Suva to Sydney (source: *Qantas  
Aeriana 1920–1954* by E. A. Crome).
5. Co-pilot on the DH86 service to Singapore,  
where Qantas services linked up with Imperial  
Airways. He mentioned a visit to the cockpit  
by Captain Patrick (of Patrick Steamship Pty,  
Brisbane), who observed that although he had  
lived an adventurous life at sea, including voyages  
around Cape Horn, flying from Singapore to  
Darwin was an even greater adventure.





In 1901, the then Duke of York, who later became King George V, visited Australia for the purpose of officiating at the Federation of Australian States. One of the Duke's escort vessels, the cruiser HMS St George, had a newfangled contraption called a wireless set installed. The chief engineer for the PMG's department, H.V. Jenvey, heard about all this, and designed and built his own transmitter/receiver. This he installed at the Queenscliff lighthouse, about 3 miles from the Point Lonsdale lighthouse, and used it to communicate with HMS St George as she approached Port Philip Bay.

In 1966, Fred wrote to the then General Manager of OTC, Harold White, asking for confirmation that this was the first recorded ship-to-shore radio communication in Australia. White's staff were able to state that it was possibly the second such event, as the first appears to have predated the Jenvey experiment by about 12 months. This was a continuous-wave Morse radio link between a Queensland gunboat, Gayundah, and the naval stores depot at Kangaroo Point, Brisbane.

Left: Frederick William Stevens, a few months old, 1898.

1898

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNMENT STATIST  
17 JUL 1898  
MELBOURNE

SCHED

BIRTHS in the District of *Camberwell* in the

No.	CHILD.			PARENTS.		
	When and where Born.	Name, and whether present or not.	Sex.	FATHER.		MOTHER.
				(1) Name and Surname, Rank or Profession of the Father. (2) Age, and (3) Birthplace.	(1) When and where Married. (2) Previous Issue, Living and Deceased.	(1) Name and Maiden Surname of the Mother. (2) Age, and (3) Birthplace.
830	<i>3rd January 1898 Spencer Crescent Camberwell Shire of Rosendoona County of Bourke.</i>	<i>Frederick William present</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>George Frederick William Stevens (Lighthousekeeper) 31 years Port Fairy Victoria Ireland</i>	<i>19th October 1893 private residence Camberwell Victoria. no previous issue</i>	<i>Emma Stevens formerly Dawes 27 years Kingston Victoria.</i>

I, *James Jamieson Tendon* Assistant Government Statist of the  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNMENT STATIST,  
*Melbourne, 16th July 1903.*

9819

## 1898-1917

## Childhood

Apparently I had displeased my mother who chastised me. I then made one of the wrong moves in my life when I said: "I will tell my Daddy," for it was then that my mother promised me that: "If you come here I will give you something to tell your daddy about." I was probably at the age of three years at this time; the place was Point Lonsdale situated at the western side of the entrance to Port Phillip Bay at the head of which stands the city of Melbourne, the capital of Victoria.

At this time (1903) there stood at Point Lonsdale the original wooden lighthouse that was built in 1863. Close by there was a new lighthouse built of stone and being equipped with the, then, most modern occulting light equipment. One evening my father, who was then the Lighthouse Keeper in charge of the local lighthouse and signal station, raised me in his arms while I placed a match to the wick of the old light for the last time and who himself on the following evening lighted the new light for the first time.

At about this time but earlier (1901) another incident in my very early childhood impinged itself firmly

on my mind. This was the occasion of the visit to Melbourne of the then Duke and Duchess of York to perform the opening ceremony of the first Australian Federal Parliament. It was not the opening of Parliament that I remember; what I do remember was the wireless installation in the Point Lonsdale Signal Station that communicated with the Royal Yacht *Ophir* as she approached Port Phillip Heads. This, almost certainly, was the first occasion upon which ship-to-shore wireless communication was established from an Australian-based station. In later years I came to know a little more about wireless and ship-to-shore communication but I can still see, after a lapse of some sixty or more years, the blue flame that jumped the "gap" of the spark coil and smell the ozone that resulted. I recall, too, the fox terrier dog that barked at me that day and that left me with a fear of dogs, particularly fox terriers, throughout the succeeding sixty years.

It was the practice then to transfer lighthouse keepers from one lighthouse to another at approximately two-yearly intervals. It came time, therefore, to leave Point Lonsdale, but I did return, and more will be heard of it later. We moved to Cape Nelson, eight miles

**ULE A.**

Colony  
e State of Victoria, Registered by Edward Wilson

INFORMANT.	WITNESSES.	REGISTRAR.		Name, if added after Registration of Birth.
		When Registered and where.	Signature of Deputy Registrar.	
Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.  G. F. W. Stevens Father Cape Nelson via Portland Victoria	(1) Accoucheur. (2) Nurse by whom Certified. And (3) Names of Occupiers, or other Witnesses.  Dr. A. V. Henderson Mrs Chapman not any	11 <sup>th</sup> February 1898  Camberwell	Edward Wilson	

State of Victoria, do hereby certify that the above is a true copy of an Entry in a Register of Births kept in this office.

*[Signature]*



## FIRST WORDS

*Mail Bag letters Why Bennelong?, Macarthur Versus Bligh and Early Meteorologist (WALKABOUT, July)* all relate history but how can we be sure of the facts?

I am asking because I have unshakeably believed for 65 years that the first occasion on which ship-shore radio-communication was effected in Australia was on May 8, 1901, when contact was made with the royal yacht *Ophir* (carrying the then Duke and Duchess of York to open the first Federal Parliament in Melbourne) from Point Lonsdale lighthouse in Victoria. I was there and saw it with my father, who was in charge of the lighthouse.

I have now been advised that the first ship-shore radio-communication in Australia was made in 1900, when the Queensland gunboat *Gayundah* exchanged signals with the Naval Stores Depot at Kangaroo Point, Brisbane. Has anyone any evidence to support either side in this matter?

F. W. STEVENS,  
Glen Iris, Vic.

Letter to the editor of *Walkabout* magazine January 1967 (published posthumously).



Right: A young Fred dressed as a sailor for a studio portrait, 1901.

from the town of Portland and close to the Victoria–South Australia border. It was at Portland that supplies were collected each week in a horse and cart driven by one or another of the three lighthouse keepers. During a part of our term at Cape Nelson my sister, my brother and myself were the only children on the station. We were rather too young for school so the absence of a school was of no consequence.

Excepting in an experimental form and then only spasmodically, wireless was not available in ships at sea in 1903. Sailing ships and steamers alike that passed Cape Nelson regularly signalled their names to the Cape Nelson signal station which details were forwarded by telegram to the responsible authorities in Melbourne. The newspapers of the day published the names of vessels and the time at which they had passed the signal stations along the coast. On the afternoon of June 19th 1904 the RMS *Australia* signalled her name and, in response, was wished a pleasant voyage. During the early hours of the following morning *Australia* ran aground at Port Phillip Heads and became a total wreck.

During this term at Cape Nelson I experienced my first “holiday”. We visited my grandmother and two aunts, who conducted a small dairy farm at East Colac, inland from the coast and some 140 miles from Cape Nelson. At Cape Nelson we had our own cow that provided us with milk and from which my mother

also processed fresh butter. At Colac there were about 15 cows; there were chickens, a couple of pigs, some ducks and a dog, “Laddie”, that helped to bring in the cows for milking each night and morning. There was also “Dick”, the sandy horse that was as temperamental as any horse ever foaled. Dick, if he did not feel disposed to pull the buggy to Colac for provisions, or to take the family to Church on Sunday morning, would sit down in his harness and squeal. Patience, petting and perseverance were the only effective remedies in this case.

Lighthouse keepers were always required to undertake local running maintenance and keep the lighthouse, the signal station and other buildings and surroundings as clean “as the proverbial hound’s tooth”. The head keeper traditionally kept a watch between 8 am and noon and again between 6 pm and 10 pm. The two assistants, alternating each day, kept watch from 10 pm to 2 am, 2 am to 8 am, and noon to 6 pm. In addition to these regular watches, seven days per week, all hands were turned-to Monday to Friday inclusive between 9 am and noon when painting, cleaning, scrubbing and polishing work was undertaken. Large repair works that were beyond the local manpower available were undertaken by works parties from Melbourne. On one occasion several workmen were busy at Cape Nelson. Although these men were expected to provide their own meals, it was not uncommon for



Fred and Harold at Wilsons Promontory ("the Prom"), 1905.



Harold, Fred and Rubie, 1905.



Rubie and Fred, 1902.



Rubie, Fred and Harold, with their mother on the porch, 1908.

my mother to bake an extra pie, or pudding, or batch of scones for these men. I recall one particular pie. My mother filled a large pie-dish with scraps of metal, nails, and a few empty cartridge-cases, placed over this one of her special pie crusts, and selected me to deliver this attractive-looking pie when the men knocked off for their lunch. This attempt at humour was very well received by the men and was a subject for discussion in our family long afterwards. Of course, as soon as the men had been given time to fully appreciate the joke, my sister delivered a real meat pie: a pie filled with the best cuts of rabbits caught that morning, and seasoned gravy.

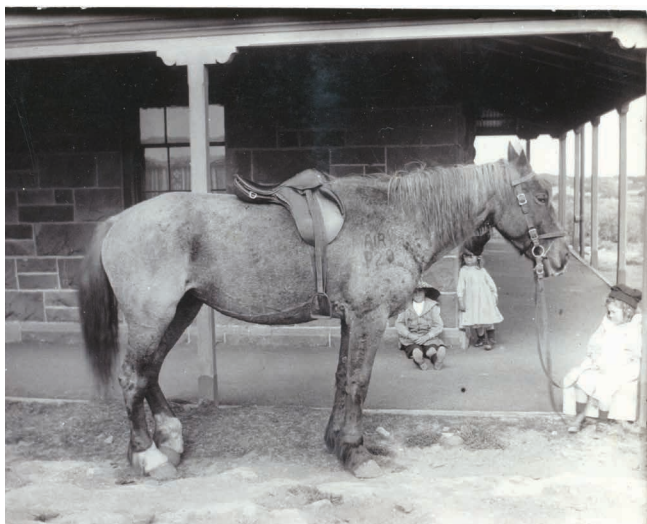
Foxes were rather plentiful at Cape Nelson but, as is a feature of all foxes, were very sly; they were difficult to trap. Sometimes a fox would be caught in a trap set for rabbits and when this occurred one of two things generally happened; either the fox would chew through his leg where it was caught in the trap and disappear, or the trap peg would be pulled from the ground and the fox [would] depart dragging the trap. In this latter event we would set out to track the fox, following the

scratches made by the trap on the ground. Sometimes we would find the trap with the fox's paw in it but the fox gone; sometimes we would not be able to follow the track through bracken fern and scrub, but there were occasions when we did find the fox, which would be killed and skinned. A fox skin, if carefully tanned, was worth useful money.

There was provided at Cape Nelson, as at several other lighthouses, a set of equipment known as the "life-saving apparatus". This consisted of high-powered rockets, a variety of ropes, a [breeches buoy], and ancillaries which, if a vessel were to be wrecked in the vicinity of the lighthouse, would provide some chance of rescuing those aboard the vessel. In order that this apparatus might be moved to a particular point on the coast, a waggon and a horse to draw the waggon was also provided. The horse and waggon, however, also served as a means of transporting provisions, in the case of Cape Nelson from Portland usually once per week. The old horse was Gypsy. Now Gypsy was almost as cunning as the foxes. Normally Gypsy would be required for duty on Friday mornings. Gypsy, however, always seemed







Possibly Gypsy the horse, with Fred (seated), Rubie (right) and another child, 1903.

to know when Thursday evenings were on hand as it was usual for this old horse, during Thursday nights, to hide herself in a patch of scrub. She learned to open gates; she learned to find a different patch of scrub each week but she never sulked. When she was eventually found she would perform her allotted task willingly and well but there always seemed to be a twinkle in her eye as if to say: "I tricked you, didn't I?"

From Cape Nelson we moved to the Split Point lighthouse. The Split Point lighthouse was located on a headland close to the village of Aireys Inlet. In more recent times the name "Aireys Inlet" has been applied on maps and charts to the lighthouse too. Our lives took on a varied turn at Aireys Inlet; there was a school, and this was our first attendance at a school, the discipline that resulted being something new to us. There was some river fishing, some surf fishing from the beach and some rock fishing at Aireys Inlet. Ample crayfish could be caught from Eagle Rock that sat close to the shore but which could be reached only at low water. There is little better as a meal for a hungry school boy than a crayfish caught from Eagle Rock, cooked in a tin of seawater over a driftwood fire on the

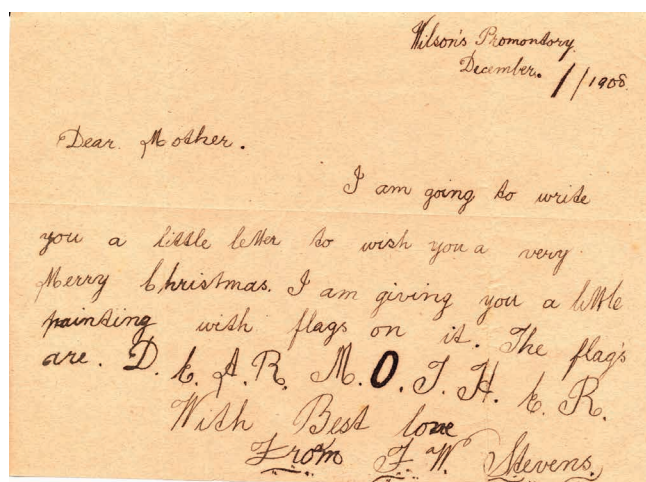
beach and helped along with home made bread and butter.

In these days (1906) Cobb & Co. coaches still operated. Bullock teams were also relatively common; our bulk supplies were brought to Aireys Inlet by bullock waggon from Wensleydale. Where now exists that part of the Great Ocean Road, Geelong to Aireys Inlet and beyond, there then was a sandy track. The Cobb & Co. coach left Geelong after an early breakfast, stopped to change horses at Torquay and reached Aireys Inlet about nightfall. Passengers generally walked up sandy hills to ease the strain on the horses, climbed aboard the coach again on the crest of the hill and rode down the other side.

On this occasion we were transferred again rather more quickly than usual; we spent but 1 year and 8 months at Aireys Inlet. In January 1908 we were instructed to move to Wilsons Promontory, the southern-most lighthouse to the Australian mainland. A Cobb & Co. coach carried us to Geelong, where we joined a train for Melbourne in commencement of a new adventure that would involve a sea voyage, which was something quite different in our young lives. It was an adventure too in that, while in the past our supplies had always been delivered by road, be it sometimes by bullock waggon, we would now be dependent upon sea transportation for the necessities of life. It has been said that "Variety is the spice of life," and surely there was variety in our young lives.

We were now about to proceed to one of the most isolated light-house stations and where bulk supplies of provisions and other necessities of life would be delivered only each three months. It was necessary, therefore, that bags of flour, bags of sugar, cases of biscuits and of jam and of many other things must be ordered ahead. There was also a need to place orders for large quantities of oil for the light, coal for cooking and heating and fodder for the horse, but this was the responsibility of the keeper being relieved and not my father's responsibility until the next orders were due.

We were astir very early on the morning of departure on our great adventure. We said a sad farewell to the relations who had cared for us during our few days in Melbourne and travelled by train to Williamstown, an outer suburb, where we were to join the Lighthouse Steamer *Lady Loch*. My father had served some time at sea in past years and was at home in the *Lady Loch*, but my mother's experience at sea had been limited to that of a passenger in the *Casino* from Melbourne to Portland when I was but a few weeks old and of which voyage I, naturally, remembered nothing. None of us,





my brother or sister or myself, really knew anything of life at sea excepting that which we had seen from lighthouses ashore.

The run down the Bay, from Williamstown to Queenscliff, was quite pleasant. As we passed out through the Heads between Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean there was considerable interest in now seeing those places from the sailors' point of view. The *Loch*, as she was familiarly known, was a single-screw steamer of yacht-like design – black hull, tall yellow funnel, two nicely raked masts and white deckhouses. Although the *Lady Loch* invariably carried one or two families to or from “outside” lighthouses, she was ill-equipped for the task. There were two or three so-called state-rooms but generally speaking passengers were forced to sleep on settees or anywhere else that was available under cover. We rolled, as only the old *Loch* could roll, along the coast and were abeam of Cape Schanck late that afternoon. As night settled over the ship we “turned in” and tried to sleep but without very much success. The excitement; the strange noises; the motion of the ship and seasickness did not encourage sleep. At sometime about 4 am we passed Wilsons Promontory and anchored in the shelter of Waterloo Bay a little to the eastward of the “Prom”. Then daylight came in, the ship was moved into East Bay, an indent on the eastern side of the Promontory, and again anchored. A whale-boat (sometimes in these circumstances called a work-boat) was loaded with boxes of personal effects, cases of stores and, for ballast, some bags of coal. We were placed on top of this mixed cargo and pulled ashore to the East Landing, where we stepped ashore, with some difficulty, onto the granite rocky shore of Wilsons Promontory. While the boat returned again and again for further cargo we commenced our long walk to the lighthouse and the quarters that would be our home for almost 2½ years, rising as we did some 350 feet above sea level.

Wilsons Promontory in addition to having a particularly important navigational lighthouse also had a particularly important signal station. Every vessel, sailing vessel or steamer, that passed the “Prom” signalled her name; many vessels that had left a distant port perhaps months previously were given orders from their owners or agents through the Wilsons Promontory signal station as to their next movement. The type of order would follow the pattern: “You are ordered to proceed to Newcastle direct.” The Morse lamp was not in use when we first were transferred to Wilsons Promontory, with the result that the international code of flag signalling by day was the only means of conveying information. A vessel that expected orders through the



The *Wyrallah* in port in Melbourne, circa 1921.

“Prom” would arrange speed to ensure passing there during daylight hours. In due course the Morse lamp was introduced, the first steamer to communicate with the Prom by Morse lamp being the Adelaide Steamship Coy steamer *Marloo*. In due course other ships were equipped with a Morse lamp and officers [were] trained in its use. I, although still a boy, soon became proficient in the use of the Morse lamp, and indeed with all other forms of approved signalling, including semaphore and the international code. Sometimes, during a Sunday evening when, as often happened, a number of vessels would pass the Prom en route from Sydney to Melbourne, it was not uncommon for my father to be talking by Morse lamp to one ship at sea while I was talking to another.

Although the *Lady Loch* brought bulk supplies but once each three months, it was usual for one of the small steamers – the *Wyrallah*, the *Queenscliffe* or the *Moonah*, or perhaps the *Despatch* that plied between Melbourne and Gippsland Lakes ports – to stop engines in either East Bay or West Bay depending upon the weather conditions and pass to our small boat that would put out, mail, newspapers, sometimes fresh





### LONELY GOATHERD

*Serving the Lights* (WALKABOUT, August) brought back memories of boyhood years spent at several "outside" lighthouses. Memories of scrambling ashore from a workboat, removing the water pipes between the roof and the fresh water tanks when gales threw spray from the ocean over the house tops, rounding up the milking goats, and being in bed with whooping cough when the nearest doctor was miles away across the turbulent ocean, have tumbled again through my mind.

Before *Cape York*, the lighthouse tender about which the article tells, there was the *Lady Loch*, later used as a barge on the Brisbane River. Before *Lady Loch*, there was the *Despatch*, which was later wrecked at the mouth of Lakes Entrance in Gippsland, Victoria.

F. W. STEVENS,  
Glen Iris, Vic.

### AGGRESSIVE DINGOES

Bill Courtney's letter *Dingo Defended* (Mail Bag, July) reminded me that, although dingoes are supposed not to molest human beings, I actually saw two "bail up" my father near the west landing at Wilson's Promontory lighthouse 60 years ago. They marooned him on a high granite rock for an hour or more until I was able to run home for a rifle and frighten them away. However, there was never any evidence that they molested the domestic goats (even young kids) and poultry which wandered freely about the lighthouse settlement or in the fern gullies.

Jeff Carter's *Lonesome Travellers* (WALKABOUT, July) was an outstanding story about much of the outback that I know very well.

F. W. STEVENS,  
Glen Iris, Vic.

Letters to the editor of *Walkabout* magazine, 1966.

meat and sometimes fresh butter. Usually "mail day" was Thursday but this sometimes was Sunday. Usually *Wyrallah* was our mail steamer, and as soon as she was sighted emerging from "Little Bourke Street", a narrow passage between the mainland and a small island, the cry would go up "*Wyrallah!*", often contracted to "Wy-wup!", which would be the signal for the boat's crew to hasten to the landing and get the boat launched, be it day or night, fine or foul, wet or dry. It was rare for the *Wyrallah* to by-pass the Prom because of weather, and this only if a southerly gale had built up dangerous seas at both the East and the West landings.

Once while we were at the Prom a steamer that had run short of bunker coal due to a long spell en route of bad weather struggled under the lee of the headland making only sufficient steam by burning hatch covers, wooden derricks and doors from the ship's fittings. On another occasion a collier bound [for] Melbourne from Newcastle, the *Lady Mildred*, went ashore in Waterloo Bay in fog and became a total wreck. The crew came ashore at Wilsons Promontory and lived with us until they were picked up by another steamer soon after their ship was wrecked.

We children were now coming to the age when some form of education was a real necessity. For a time we had a Governess, who thoroughly enjoyed the free life of Wilsons Promontory and its ample fresh sea air. Whether we learned very much I rather doubt.

Accidents and illness at "outside" lighthouses always, fortunately, seem to be rare occurrences. When such misfortunes overtake those who tend the isolated lighthouses, newspaper headlines are usually made. During our term at Wilsons Promontory but one illness of note overtook my brother, my sister and myself; we, together, contracted whooping cough, which at any time is a somewhat distressing complaint.

At Wilsons Promontory three cases of whooping cough was, to my mother, something of a tragedy. The nearest doctor and chemist were located at Foster, some 60 miles from the "Prom" and connected to the "Prom" only by a track over which nothing but a man on horseback could travel. Fortunately, however, there was telephonic connection between these two places. A telephonic consultation between my father and the Foster doctor resulted in the telephone-line inspector packing into his saddle-bag a bottle of medicine and setting out on the long and lonely trip to the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse. As was the practice when the inspector made his periodical inspection trips along the telephone line, a night-stop, for rest to both man and horse, was made at the Darby rest house. It was not, therefore, until the end of the second day after leaving Foster that our bottle of medicine was delivered and our coughs eased.

A devastating bushfire raged through Wilsons Promontory National Park and crept closer to our settlement than was comfortable. We found the heat and smoke from the bushfire very uncomfortable. A few days later and when the fires had died down, my father and I climbed the mountain behind the lighthouse and walked several miles towards Oberon Bay. Scattered on the ground were many dead animals that had been overcome by the fire. There were kangaroos, koalas and, rather strangely, two native cats. One of our milking goats that, apparently, had been cut off by the fast-travelling fire was also found dead on the mountain slope.

There was always good fishing at Wilsons Promontory. From the rocky shore we caught rockfish, leather-jackets, sweep and crayfish; from the boat we caught flat-head and barracouta. Fishing for sweep was an interesting procedure. Usually we took a limpet from the



rocks as bait for a rockfish. In turn the rockfish would be used as bait in a net to catch a crayfish, which in turn would be used as bait for the sweep. The sweep is an epicure in the fish kingdom.

We, all too soon, were time expired at Wilsons Promontory, so, once again, pictures were removed from the walls and with kitchen utensils, crockery and glassware, blankets and bed linen, and the piano, were packed in specially designed cases, lowered on the “flying fox” to the East Landing and sent aboard the *Lady Loch*. We said a rather sad farewell to the “Prom” and trekked this time back to the Point Lonsdale lighthouse, which I remembered rather vaguely for the reasons explained earlier.

State School No. 5522 still stands at Point Lonsdale and it was there that I commenced my rather short but concentrated school life. Now, at the age of 12 years, I had the benefit of but 2 years’ regular schooling. During the next 2 years I succeeded in holding a place in the 5th Grade. I, however, retained my interest in ship-ping and in ship-to-shore signalling; I also developed an interest in gardening. I recall that I was, by popular vote within the School, allotted a prize for gardening.

My interesting life was almost brought to an abrupt end while we were, on this occasion, at Point Lonsdale. One fine summer evening, while my brother and myself were swimming near the pier, my brother, who was not then a swimmer of any note, got into difficulties in deep water. I, who was too anything but a swimmer of note, and without weighing the possible consequences, attempted to bring my brother ashore. My father, who was watching his two sons from the pier, and who soon appraised the situation, brought my brother ashore little the worse for wear. Someone else was bending over me on the beach when I regained consciousness. My recompense for my efforts was a period in bed under a doctor’s care. Apparently I did not suffer any serious ill-effects as I was soon back at school. Whether it was because of my knowledge of the subject, or whether it was because of my semi-drowning episode I am not sure; I was soon, however, elected within the School as the “official” umpire when we played Australian Rules football.

## Miraculous escape from drowning at Point Lonsdale

The following has been taken from an article published in *The Sentinel*, 19 November 1910.

“In a very simple way almost a whole family may on Wednesday have lost their lives by drowning. Mrs Stevens, wife of Mr GW Stevens Lightkeeper stationed at Point Lonsdale with three children went down to the beach, and from what can be gathered the children carried with them a small box to play boat with. After being in the water a short time Mr Stevens walked down the pier and seeing the children with the box cautioned them not to play with it knowing there was deep water near. The eldest boy, Fred, threw the box out into deep water and the younger boy thought he would try and secure it, and after going a short distance he was in trouble through getting into the deep water. Fred the older boy of the two seeing his brother struggling in the water hurried to his assistance and caught hold of him keeping him afloat for a minute or so and then sank. The little girl, when both sank, tried to reach them but seeing they were far beyond her reach screamed for assistance. The mother heard the girl’s scream and hurried to the spot having to run about 100 yards. She caught hold of the younger boy, and after a short swim both sank leaving the other boy struggling in the water by himself. Mr Stevens was in the lifeboat shed and hearing the screams hastened to know what was the matter and saw the two boys struggling ...

“He then raced down the pier about 60 yards to where they were in the water throwing off his coat as he ran and jumped over the handrail into the sea about 20 feet below and swam for about 60 yards to where the three were in the water. On reaching the spot the only person visible was the eldest boy Fred who was floating face downwards. Mr Stevens then dived for his wife and youngest boy and was caught round the weeds and finding he could not release her hold struck out for the shore towing the youngest boy and his wife. As he could not reach the surface of the water Mr Stevens caught hold of Mrs Stevens arm and wrenched free and then got to the surface for a breath. Mr Stevens immediately dived again. This time the little boy Harold caught him round the neck and got his feet round his body. Knowing he had the two together he swam ashore greatly exhausted. Just then Mr A Carrow and Mr G Patterson, members of the R.A.E. hearing the alarm ran up and were in the act of helping Mr Stevens when he called them to save his other boy. This as is known they succeeded in doing, only for them the little lad would have been drowned as Mr Stevens was too exhausted to save him and we hasten to record the gratification of Mr & Mrs Stevens to the two gentlemen mentioned and others who assisted in the rescue.”





Some 20 miles to the eastward of Point Lonsdale and visible when the weather permitted is Cape Schanck. It was to Cape Schanck that we were transferred when our term at Point Lonsdale expired. A short sea voyage across Port Phillip Bay from Queenscliff to Dromana and a land voyage of 15 miles by road soon found us at the last lighthouse at which I was to live as a permanent residence.

As at Cape Nelson and Wilsons Promontory, rock fishing at Cape Schanck was a repaying proposition. Rabbits in the area were plentiful and many were the rabbits that we caught in traps or shot. We used the flesh as food and to help the hens produce eggs. The rabbit skins were dried and packed and sent to Melbourne, the proceeds from which helped to keep us supplied with shoes and other items of necessity and occasional pleasure.

The Cape Schanck school was always known to us as the "Black's Camp" school as it was situated about 5 miles from the lighthouse at a place locally known as Black's Camp. Sometimes we were taken to school in the lighthouse waggon drawn by a tall chestnut horse known as Tom; sometimes I drove the horse and waggon to school and, after leaving Tom to fend for himself in the school paddock during school hours,

### HOT KANGAROO

I agree with A. Brownsey's letter entitled *Kangaroo Stew* (*Mail Bag*, December) that kangaroo meat is good when taken from a well-fed and unhunted animal.

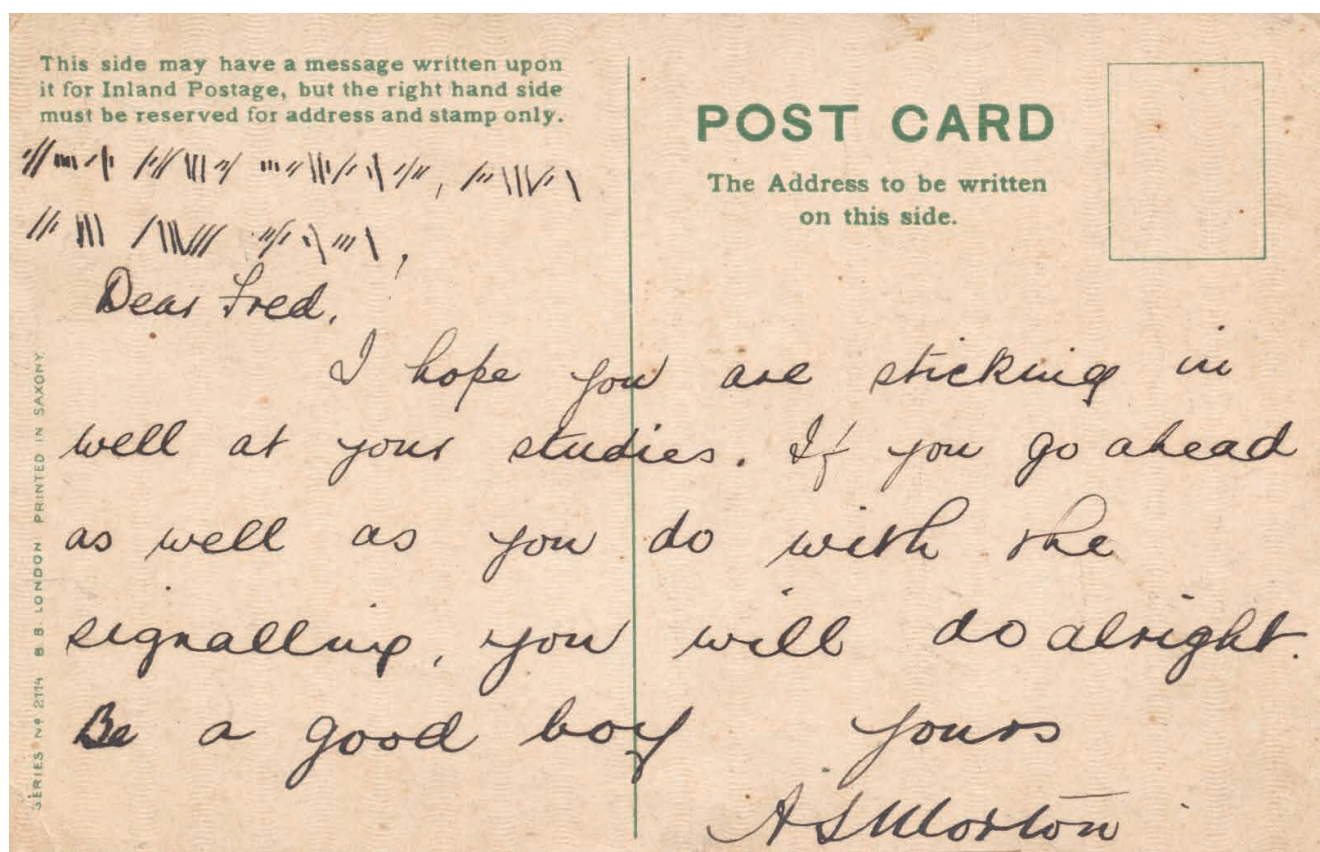
Long before the establishment of the Wilson's Promontory National Park, we at the Prom. lighthouse were glad to use 'roo meat as a change from tinned bully-beef and local fish. Kangaroos that fed peacefully in the bush fern gullies nearby proved very palatable, while the tails, with home-grown vegetables, produced excellent soup and "beef tea".

F. W. STEVENS,  
Glen Iris, Vic.

Letter to the editor of *Walkabout* magazine July 1966.

drove home again when school closed. A feature of this school was that it was a "half-time" school; it functioned on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of one week, followed by Tuesday and Thursday of the following week. On the intervening school days the one and only teacher attended the Main Ridge school some miles away and which too was a half-time school. This old school, which consisted of one small room and which carried the recognition number 2168, was finally closed in 1921 and the building [was] sold for removal. It cost the purchaser £82. This school had initially been opened in July 1879.

Postcard to a young Fred around 1913 from A. S. Morton. The Morse code says: "WHEN YOU SIGNAL, DONT GO TOO FAST."







## 1913, Telegraph messenger

We had been resident at Cape Schanck perhaps 18 months when my father said to me without warning: "I cannot keep you any longer; I have arranged a job for you." With little time to think about this new development in my life, my few personal belongings in a box and myself were loaded into the waggon. With old Tom drawing the waggon, my father took me to Dromana. First he took me to a house that I had never previously seen and introduced me to an old lady. I was told: "This is where you will live and this is the lady to whom you will pay 12/6d per week for board and lodgings." I was then taken to the local semi-official Post Office and again introduced to an old lady and this time told: "This is where you will work and this is the lady who will pay you 15/- per week." I was then given by my father a golden sovereign such as I had never previously handled and told: "This will be a start in life." My father then went back to the Cape Schanck lighthouse while I, who had never previously been away from home alone, started out on a life of adventure. I periodically returned home on short visits and regularly corresponded with my mother until she passed to her final rest 50 years later, being pre-deceased by my father some 10 years earlier. I never did return "home" on anything resembling a permanent basis.

My "official" job of work at Dromana was in the capacity of what then was known as a "Telegraph Messenger", which, as the designation implies, was the delivery of telegrams. Telegraph Messengers of the past, however, were "handy men" or more correctly "dog's bodies" who were expected, in addition to delivering telegrams, to clean door knobs, wash and re-fill inkwells, wash windows, keep the Post Mistress supplied with chopped wood, collect the Post Mistress's meat from the butcher's, attend to the small telephone exchange and, when he had proved his reliability and honesty, sell stamps and deliver letters over the Post Office counter. Still later, when he had developed the ability, he was required to receive and transmit telegrams on the Morse circuit connecting Dromana, Sorrento, and Mornington with Melbourne. My earlier Morse lamp operating ability gave me a good start in this latter regard and soon I was almost "running" the little Post Office while the Post Mistress sat before her fire on cold winter days. Between 8:30 am and 8 pm, with such time as was possible to find for lunch, I slaved at the Dromana Post Office Mondays to Saturdays inclusive.

From the golden sovereign that was given to me by my father when I first arrived at Dromana, I paid a small



Fred as a newly minted telegraph messenger, 1913.

deposit on a second-hand bicycle which I used on my messenger duties and to travel from my residence to work and return. Sometimes, after my Saturday's work was over, I would mount my bicycle and ride it 15 miles to Cape Schanck to visit my folk and return Sunday evening or very early Monday morning. As may be easily calculated there was a difference of 2/6d between my income and my regular expenditure for board and lodgings. Somehow, from this 2/6d I was able to pay off the amount still owing on my bicycle and, very occasionally, visit without a partner the local weekly dance and card evening. Laundry was included in my board and lodging but it soon became necessary to purchase some new clothes. This was a problem that I had to face alone.

As can be judged, my basic education was extremely limited. If I were to decide to make the Post Office my future source of livelihood it would be necessary to obtain permanent appointment to the Commonwealth Public Service, and this in turn would make it necessary to qualify through an entrance examination. My education was not then up to the standard required to pass this rather simple qualifying examination. By good chance the local School Teacher sympathised with me in my predicament. Not only did he en-





Cliffy Island.

courage me to study; he gave me access to suitable books and all at no expense to me. However, as there were only Sundays, and evenings after 8 pm, during which I could study, progress was slow. I attempted two entrance examinations in other towns but failed dismally. In due course, however, a vacancy was advertised at the Flinders Post Office, some 15 miles over the mountain from Dromana and some 10 miles to the east of Cape Schanck. There were two entrants for this examination and my joy was unbounded when it was announced that I had achieved a few marks more than my competitor. I left Dromana and travelled to Flinders and started a new life there, but again I received the sum of 15/- per week and paid 12/6d per week for my board and lodgings, which again included laundry. Now, however, I was issued with an official Post Office uniform, which eased my clothing difficulties to some extent. There was another advantage: the Post Office was closed each Wednesday at 1 pm, which meant that each Wednesday afternoon was free. Some Wednesday afternoons I spent with an old fisherman who had befriended me and in whose fishing boat I spent many pleasant hours. The occasional visit to Cape Schanck on Saturday evening or Sunday continued, but this came to an end when my folk were transferred once again and this time to Cliffy Island, which lies some 19 miles to the north-east of Wilsons

Promontory and which, in fine weather, can be seen from the "Prom" lighthouse.

In due course I was relieved from my Messenger duties at Flinders for a 5-weeks vacation period. I travelled to Melbourne, joined the little steamer *Queenscliffe* en route to Sale in the Gippsland Lakes, and was put ashore around midnight, twenty-eight hours later, at Cliffy Island. Cliffy Island is nothing but a solid rock without vegetation of any description excepting for a small amount of "pig-face" that grows here and there on the rock face. The Island is unprotected from the elements and long days may pass when it is quite impossible to land at or be taken from the Island. There is the lighthouse and associated storeroom and there are three houses occupied by the light keepers; that is Cliffy Island. I spent but a little over a week at Cliffy Island when it became apparent that, if I did not soon leave, I might be marooned there long past my leave period. I had expected to be there for at least a fortnight. The *Wyrallah* that used to deliver our mail at Wilsons Promontory was due to pass Cliffy Island one evening about tea time and as the wind was freshening and the sky looking ominous I decided to board *Wyrallah* and this I did in a rising sea. Next Morning *Wyrallah* entered Gippsland Lakes and tied up at the wharf at what was then Cunningham but which later was known as Lakes Entrance. Later that day the ship



moved up the river to Bairnsdale, from where I travelled by train to Melbourne and so back to Flinders.

The First World War, the 1914–1918 war, the war to end all wars, was now under way. There was the Gallipoli Campaign about to develop. Flinders, which was the mainland terminal of the Victoria–Tasmania telegraph cable, was provided with a military guard. A few men from Flinders entered the Army or the Navy. I was yet too young to enlist; I did, however, manage to pass another Post Office examination and, in being promoted, was transferred to a new office at Woomelang in the Malley [sic] country of Victoria.

At Woomelang there were but the Postmaster and myself. On three mornings each week mail was despatched to outlying places as early as 6 am; each evening as late as 11 pm mail was received from the Melbourne to Mildura train. During the day there was counter work, which was considerable in that wheat-growing centre; there was a daily mail delivery; there was telegraph traffic and there was a telegraph delivery service. Woomelang was a testing ground for any young enthusiast. It is perhaps not unreasonable, therefore, that after spending one very hot summer in Woomelang I applied for a vacancy back at Flinders and which was created by the enlistment of the young man in the position there similar to [w]hat I held at Woomelang. Rather unexpected but with considerable satisfaction my application for the Flinders transfer was approved; I returned to Flinders and was once again with old friends, and I must admit with a workload much less than that which I had carried at Woomelang.

When I left Flinders for Woomelang, tall and willowy Marjorie kissed me and cried. When I returned to Flinders but a few months later Marjorie had married and left the district.

I needed a dentist's attention. I rode my bicycle 15 miles to Bittern and from there travelled by train to Melbourne. The dentist extracted a dozen teeth. I returned to Bittern by train and rode my bicycle 15 miles to Flinders.

I soon became restless in that my friends were enlisting while I was continuing to live a life of relative ease. I applied to the Post Master General's Department for leave to enlist. I was refused leave on the basis that my telegraph operating ability was valued. There was, however, no man power control under which I could be forced to remain in civil employment. I tendered my resignation from the Commonwealth Public Service and soon this resignation was accepted which proved, to my way of thinking, that I was not indispensable as had been suggested. I was forthwith accepted by the Royal Australian Navy, drafted to a wireless school in Melbourne, and commenced training.

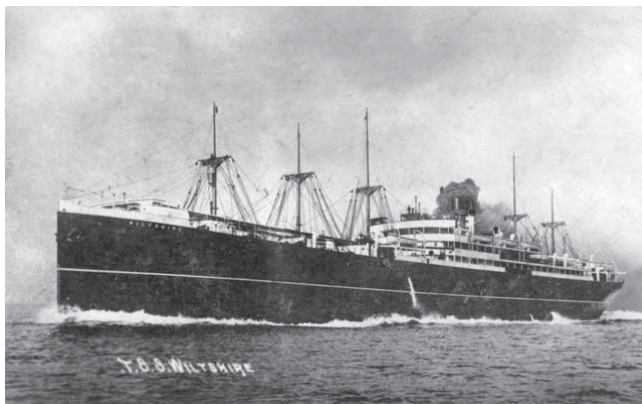
In due course I was given a 2nd Class railway ticket to Sydney and instructed to report aboard the troop ship *HMAT Wiltshire*, officially known as "A18". I had already seen *Wiltshire* from the Cape Schanck lighthouse and she appealed to me as my future home. Rumour said that she would soon leave Sydney for the United Kingdom.



## 1917, World War 1 – HMAT *Wiltshire*

I had resigned from the Post Master General's Department early in the days of the First World War full of youthful exuberance and determined to do "my bit" for my King and Country. I had taken a short course in radio communication and offered my services to the Royal Australian Navy.

I was accepted, given a 2nd class railway ticket to Sydney and instructed to report aboard the troopship HMAT *Wiltshire*, shortly to sail for the United Kingdom.



Never previously having travelled far afield from Melbourne, the train trip to Sydney, with all the discomforts of a cramped seat; the long night hours; the cold; the lack of knowledge of the outside world, and the absence of friends and relations had at least an element of excitement. Arrival in Sydney next morning presented an anti climax. There was nobody to meet me; I did not know the geography of Sydney; was hungry but did not have the knowledge, or common sense, that would have enabled me to "cloak" my cases and find a cafe. Somehow, probably by tram, I found my way to Circular Quay and from there, after putting up a plaintive plea, was rather ungraciously taken to the gangway of *Wiltshire* on a RAN tender.

The "Old Man", Captain Heyward, with whom I later became reasonably friendly, accepted me with little grace. "What was I doing aboard?" "Who sent me and why?" "Are your papers in order, you are but a kid?" He soon discovered that my papers were not in order and forthwith sent me ashore to remain there until they were. He did, however, suggest with rather bad grace that I should visit the Shipping Office.

All bad things have an ending with the result that I was finally signed on the ship, took my rather battered cases aboard and was given a 2-berth passenger cabin "until something else" could be found for me. Nothing else was ever found for me and I made that my home away from home during two years at sea. It was

necessary, however, later to share that small space with another crew member with whom I did not always see eye to eye. I had been brought up in a very strict home where smoking and drinking were both inventions of the Devil with the result that, at times, I found the life in that cabin almost more than my young and inexperienced person could bear.

The *Wiltshire* remained tied up at No. 1 buoy for several days. Coal and provision lighters came alongside to discharge fuel for both engines and men. I discovered later that our boilers used about 110 tons of coal per day, which meant that we would leave Sydney with something about 5000 tons of bunker coal aboard. I discovered later, too, that when we left Sydney there would be about 2000 souls aboard the ship and this, of course, meant that we must load tons of meat, tons of flour, tons of tinned milk and tons of much other items of food. While we were tied up at No. 1 buoy there was some difficulty in getting ashore and back on board again. However, whether "Tubby" Heyward felt a little sorry for the youngster who had joined his ship or whether he felt that I had at least a little sense of responsibility, Captain Heyward selected me to collect the mail from the office ashore each day and sometimes gave me other messenger duties to perform. I took this to be an honour bestowed upon me and tried very hard to please the "Old Man" with, I believe, some success, as later parts of the story of life in *Wiltshire* will indicate.

At last the day came when the ship was moved alongside at Woolloomooloo. Here, army equipment soon began to come aboard and, finally, before daylight one morning I awoke to hear much activity on the wharf. As soon as I could pull on some clothes I went on deck to find a sight that still lives on. The wharf was packed with soldiers in uniform while outside the dock gates was a big assembly of wives, sweethearts, fathers and mothers to bid farewell to the soldiers going overseas. There were coarse shouts; there were funny remarks; there were hand-shakes, there was some singing and there were tears. I had nobody to sigh for me nor to cry for me; I stood alone in the quiet corner of the boat deck and tried to be a man. The 750 New South Wales troops were soon aboard, streamers fluttered in the early morning breeze, a band played, the ship's lines were singled up and soon we were moving slowly out into the stream. We anchored in Athol Bight.

As the day wore on so did the weather change. Rain fell; the wind blew and the choppy sea in the harbour built up. About 4 pm several of the Sydney ferries



Fred aboard *Wiltshire*, affecting a pipe, 1917.

ranged alongside and disgorged through our gangways another 850 troops who had travelled down by train from Queensland. Now, with a crew of over 500 all told we had on board *Wiltshire* something between 1900 and 2000 souls which, by First War standards was a goodly number of people to have aboard any ship of war. The sun set behind rain clouds; the curtain of night folded around us; the pilot came aboard; the anchor was hove in and soon we were heading for the open sea.

*Wiltshire* or, as she was then more correctly known, HMAT (His Majesty's Australian Transport) A18, was, in peace time, a Federal Shire Line passenger and cargo steamer of some 14,000 tons, that traded between England and Australia. She had considerable refrigerated space for the carriage of frozen meat and butter to the old country but also had payable space for the carriage of general cargo. Normally she carried but one Wireless Officer; now that she was a troopship and would be entering war zones she carried 5 such officers. The Senior Wireless Officer was an Englishman of rather reserved habits and with whom it was almost impossible to develop a conversation. The second man, like myself, was an Australian; I was the very junior third man. It was apparently traditional that the junior man should be given the 4 to 8 watch – that is, 4 am to 8 am and 4 pm to 8 pm.

Soon after leaving Sydney and noticing the motion of the ship I decided that it would be wise to turn in. I was called by the quarter-master at 3:45 am (one bell) and turned out immediately, full of enthusiasm for my first real watch at sea. I climbed to the bridge where the wireless room was located and very soon after brief hand-over the 2nd man departed to enjoy a few hours sleep before breakfast. My enthusiasm was short-lived. Probably I was frightened of my responsibilities; probably it was the extremely strong mug of tea and ship's biscuit delivered to the wireless room by the quarter-master, or probably it was a combination of these and the motion of the ship that made me wish I were still ashore in my old Post Office job. I was ill. I was not in a fit state to keep a wireless watch of a standard that was demanded by the presence aboard of some 2000 souls, but keep a watch I did between bouts of seasickness. 8 am finally came and, somehow, I struggled down to my bunk and flung myself upon it still in my uniform which but a few hours earlier had given me so much satisfaction. Nobody cared if I lived or died; nobody came to enquire about my health but the sea got rougher and the ship rose and fell to the ocean swell. As we rounded Gabo Island and headed west across the "paddock", the ship now rolled, which I found a little easier than the pitching motion earlier. I had a little fruit in my cabin and had sense enough to eat some of it with the result that I had sufficient strength to climb once again to the bridge and the wireless office at 4 pm. The 4 pm to 8 pm man was relieved between 5:50 and 6 pm for tea, which was served in the Officers' Mess below the Bridge. Somehow I managed to eat something but it refused to remain where it was supposed to do good. Another similar night and another similar day followed. On the third evening at sea my appearance must have rung a bell of sympathy in the mind of the old Chief Engineer – a Scot, as one might imagine, for this seems to be traditional in Chief Engineers at sea – as I passed him on deck. "Look you here, my boy, this is no guid; come awa' wi' me and I'll gi' you a cure for your troubles," is what he said. I would have taken phenyle if it was to cure my troubles. The kindly old "Chief" gave me something in a glass, told me to get into my bunk, to drink his tonic and tomorrow all would be well. In later days it came upon me that the old "Chief" had given me a double whisky which sent me into the best sleep and the most restful sleep I had experienced for days. Although the quartermaster apparently experienced some difficulty in getting me on my feet at 5:45 am next morning, I soon recovered in the cool air on deck. I have never since been sick at sea or in the air.

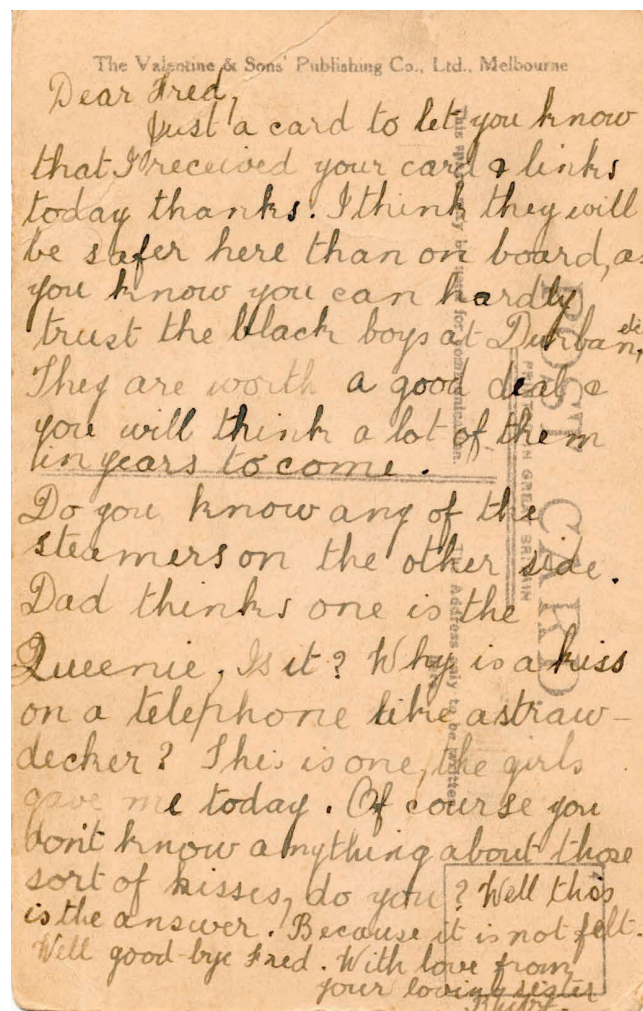


Security is something that is talked about particularly in war time. The enforcing of security is another matter. We were not supposed to know that we were heading from Sydney, non-stop, for Durban in South Africa. It is likely, however, that before we left Sydney Heads astern, everybody in A18 knew exactly where we were going and that we would be at sea for approximately three weeks.

The run across the Indian Ocean was generally fine. The crew settled down to routine jobs; the soldiers, some of them taking longer than I to overcome the seasickness, exercised on deck, played games and wrote letters. Sunday mornings there were church parades. One of my most vivid memories of this part of the trip was listening from the boat deck one fine Sunday morning to three quite independent Church services proceeding in different parts of the ship. This gave me cause to wonder what it sounds like in Heaven on a Sunday morning. The only band aboard the ship was a small pipe band. I like the pipes in their place but they can become wearisome when there is no other music, day after day, and week after week. There was a bugle, however, and this seemed to be sounded for many purposes and at many times. I could always recognise the "reveille" at 6 am (it was sounded from the deck above my wireless office), but otherwise I have never been able to successfully interpret the many Army bugle calls.

Once one becomes accustomed to the sounds at sea it is only when the regular sounds cease that one awakes. There came an early morning 21 days after leaving Sydney that I awoke. The time was three o'clock; all was quiet. We had arrived in the Durban Harbour and the engines had been stopped. As we did not need to keep a wireless watch in port, I, after 21 early morning calls could, and did, roll over and go to sleep again until breakfast time. The first leg of our journey to England was over.

At daylight we were put alongside a coal wharf where more coal was poured into our bunkers and where many tons of fresh water also was taken aboard. Some leave was granted but, after only about 12 hours in Durban, we sailed again for Cape Town; we followed the coast of South Africa most of the way. I was on watch when we entered the Cape Town Harbour and could see the Table Mountain in the background sheltering the city of Cape Town. We anchored about three miles off shore until daylight when we, once again, went alongside a wharf almost at the foot of the city's main street. I recall Cape Town for several reasons; one, I saw my first movie there; two, I bought my first camera there; and three, I saw for the first



Postcard from Rubie to Fred aboard the *Wiltshire*, 1917, received in Sierra Leone.

time many coloured people. I took a tram ride to a beautiful beach some few miles out of town. I should very much have wished to climb to the top of Table Mountain but time didn't permit and, from memory, such an expedition then was not looked upon favourably by the locals. I do not recall the circumstances but I was somehow introduced into a friendly family at Cape Town who, with quiet dignity and considerable restraint, gave to me a pleasant evening the memory of which still lingers on.

We were to form a convoy with 5 other steamers and a RN escort at Cape Town. One of the steamers was the *Osterley* that was still in Sydney when we left there but which, with her slightly greater speed, was supposed to reach Cape Town almost simultaneously with us. We had to wait three days for her.

Under the leadership and guidance of the RN Cruiser *Kent*, the six vessels of our convoy moved slowly northward from Cape Town and soon began to feel the rising temperature of the tropics. The slowest steamer in the convoy and which set our pace was the *Ayrshire*. At night now we were travelling without lights, each ship trying to keep station behind the next ahead by



Allied troops ashore from *Wiltshire* in Cape Town, South Africa, 1917.

steering on a dim, shaded blue light at the stern. The old *Ayrshire* seemed always to make poor time at night with the result, when daylight came in next morning, *Ayrshire* was often well astern and sometimes out of sight. We had no alternative to slowing down until *Ayrshire* could again take station.

My boyhood life at various lighthouses on the Victorian coast had given me a good practical grounding in visual signalling, and this our Captain soon discovered. Often I would be called out to exchange signals with our escort or with another ship in the convoy. As will be seen later, my ability in visual signalling brought me much pleasure.

Our next port of call was Freetown, Sierra Leone, on the west coast of Africa, where we spent a few hours one fine Sunday afternoon to replenish our fresh water. There was no shore leave but it was pleasant to relax in the safety of the harbour for a few hours. Mail was sent ashore here but no mail came aboard, which was a disappointment to many in our ship.

Northward bound again and soon the tropics were left behind and the cold of the northern hemisphere settled upon us. Two days out from Plymouth, six small destroyers met us and escorted us singly to port. The *Osterley* arrived first, followed a few hours later by ourselves and almost simultaneously the *Galway Castle*, each with troops to put ashore. The remaining ships of the convoy went on to other ports. We soon had unloaded our human cargo and left Plymouth as

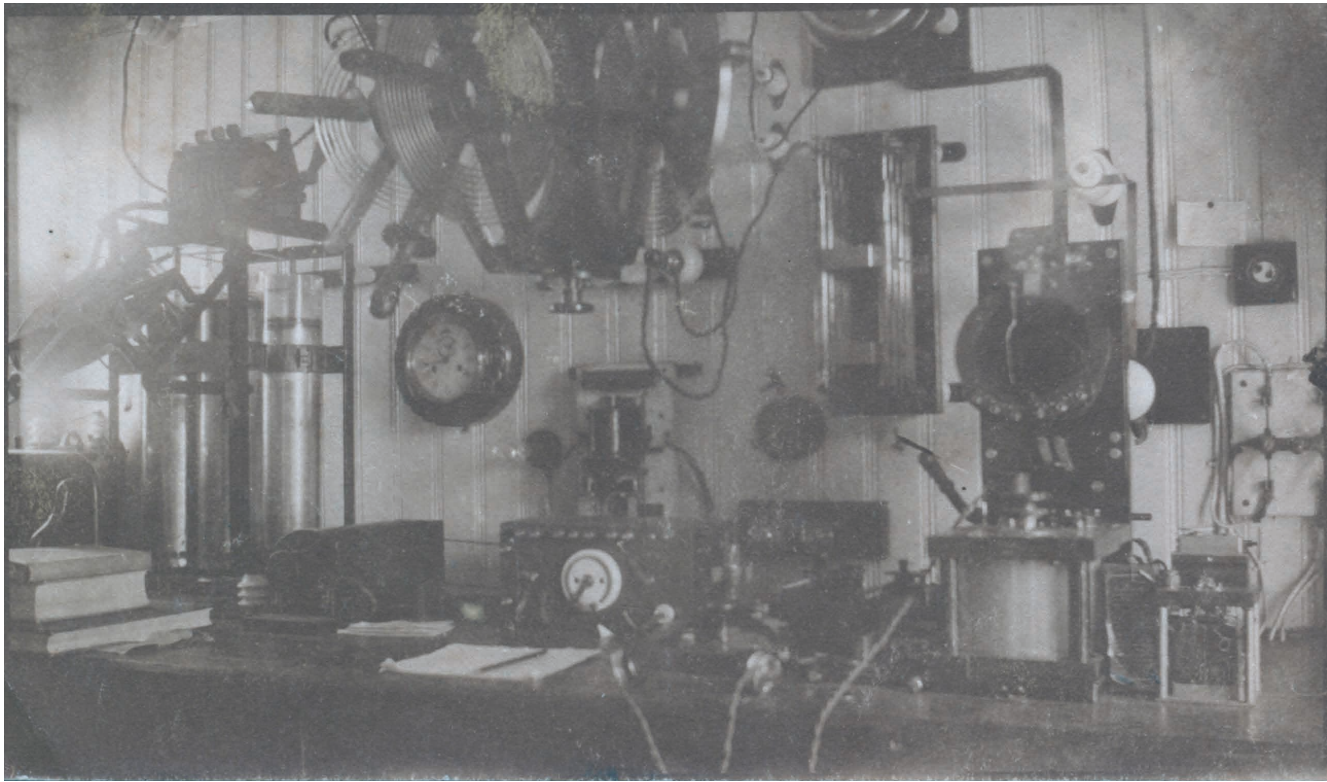
the sun was setting. As we passed her we could see that *Galway Castle* was making ready also to put to sea.

The run up from Plymouth to Tilbury Docks on the river Thames was right in the danger zone and where we could expect a submarine attack or run down a floating mine. Extra lookouts were posted day and night. So far I had not heard an SOS distress call, although the senior radio officer had heard one from a steamer out in the Atlantic ocean two nights earlier.

The second radio officer had taken ill as we approached Plymouth, with the result that the senior man and myself had to keep two 6-hours watch[es] each day. We mutually agreed that we would do six on and six off and change at 2 am and 8 am. I had but taken over my watch at 2 am on the morning after leaving Plymouth when, obviously quite close to us because of the strong signals, a steamer made an SOS call and announced that she had struck a mine and was sinking. This was the *Galway Castle* that came out of Plymouth almost on our heels. It was not our job, in the circumstances, to go to the aid of the sinking ship; that was a job for vessels set aside for the purpose. We went on our way hoping there were no mines on our track. Soon after daylight next morning, however, we were stopped by a mine sweeper while a mine was exploded by gun fire right where we would have been within a few more minutes but for the sharp lookout on the mine sweeper.

Saturday morning we tied up in Tilbury Dock and





The wireless room on the *Wiltshire*, 1917.

almost immediately every member of the crew bar one was on his way ashore; the ship was virtually deserted excepting for a watchman, and the very junior wireless officer who had no home to go to and no friends to visit. That was not all. Partly through inexperience and partly through stupidity I had not collected any wages in advance from the Purser and had nothing in reserve. From that Saturday morning until lunch time Monday I did not eat. In retrospect it is difficult to imagine a lad of 17 years of age who would spend two days without food and be so foolish as not to tell his worries to the old watchman. Of course there was then rather strict rationing of food but, if one had money, it was always possible to buy food of some kind; money however was a problem. My pay amounted to thirty shillings per week and as we had been 8 weeks en route from Sydney my available balance was £12, which had to keep me in food and accommodation, with a little left over for sight seeing during the month we spent tied up at Tilbury.

The third class train fare to London and return was 5/4d. Somehow I managed a couple of trips to London each week and there walked many miles seeing, I believe, many parts of London quite unfamiliar to many who have lived there throughout their lives. I saw Buckingham Palace; I saw Green Park and paid a penny to sit on a chair and watch the birds, and the people going by; I saw in various uniforms soldiers, sailors and one or two airmen; I saw Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Scotsmen and Englishmen.

I saw St Paul's Cathedral and joined one evening in Evensong. I saw the Embankment; I walked across the Tower Bridge and I saw Westminster Abbey. I saw only from the outside the Museum, which was closed and sand-bagged against danger from bombs. Once I travelled by train to an Australian Army Camp at Salisbury Plains and found an old Australian friend; we had a meal of eggs and ham at a little farmhouse near by. After each of these expeditions I would wearily return aboard *Wiltshire* at Tilbury and crawl into my bunk sometimes without a late meal. Excepting one night when I slept in a back-alley rooming house suggested to me by a London policeman, I always slept in the ship. Nobody was supposed to be aboard the ship excepting duty personnel and cargo handlers, yet nobody ever queried my movement on or off the ship. I did, of course as everyone else did, produce my pass at the dock gates.

Finally the ship was unloaded and we were ready to return once more to Australia. The second wireless man never re-joined the ship after his illness with the result that, during the voyage back to Australia, the senior man and I kept 6-hours watches, but in this there was some compensation for me; I was paid an additional 10/- per week and rated as second operator.

The ship was travelling in ballast and with but a dozen or so wounded Australians as passengers. In the Bay of Biscay we ran into bad weather. One of the lifeboats broke adrift and the watch on deck was sent to secure



the boat. During one particularly violent lurch of the ship three of the crew went over the side. Two men were very fortunate in that, as they fell into the water, a wave washed them back onto the main deck, shaken but alive. The third unfortunate man was never seen again.

The voyage continued without undue incident until, one day, the Captain called to me in the wireless office: "Stevens, start up your transmitter and stand-by; if you hear shooting, immediately send an SOS." For over three hours I was held in suspense; I dare not leave my post; excepting that there was obviously something unusual afoot on the Bridge I had no idea what the "shooting" might be. Finally the Captain came again to the wireless office and told me that, as far as could be judged, we were being followed by a Raider but that we were making slightly better speed than the other vessel and seemed to be pulling away. Whether that was in fact a Raider of the deep we were never sure; several hours later the other vessel turned away and left us alone on the wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. The general feeling in our ship was that we had, in fact, drawn away from a raider with but small guns and with insufficient speed to overhaul us.

Once again we called at Cape Town for coal and water and then headed along a great circle track, which took us well to the south into the cold and the long swell of the Southern Ocean, en route for Albany in Western Australia. As we approached Cape Leeuwin but not yet having sighted land an off-shore breeze brought to us the smell of the bush. At Albany we again coaled and took on fresh water. As much as I should have wished to go ashore on to Australian soil, there was no shore leave, and in any event, we were soon again at sea heading for Adelaide and then Melbourne.

We entered Port Phillip Bay soon after I handed over my watch at 2 am one morning. I should have turned in. I found I had no interest in sleep but rather did I enjoy the run up the Bay and the anticipation of seeing again the home folk who were there to greet me when we tied up.

I was given a week[s] leave which I spent at home, but this soon passed and I was soon on a train Sydney-bound to re-join my ship, which I found in dry dock. A whole week passed before the ship was floated out of the dry dock; a whole week that I could have enjoyed in Melbourne but which I, with the remainder of the crew, had to spend in uncomfortable conditions that always surround a ship in dry dock.

From Sydney we went north to Townsville to load frozen meat, then to Brisbane for more meat and some

general cargo and finally back to Sydney to pick up a few Doctors, a handful of hospital orderlies and 56 Nursing Sisters for transportation to Egypt.

On this occasion we coaled and took on fresh water at Fremantle, the port for Perth, the capital of Western Australia. It was a hot, gusty wind that greeted us at Fremantle but what did a hot and gusty wind mean when shore leave was granted? Several of us, including some Army personnel and three Nursing Sisters (myself being the boy of the party), travelled to Perth by train, saw the city sights and spent several very pleasant hours in the Botanical Gardens. But the time was all too short and soon we were at sea again bound for Colombo.

It was at Colombo, where leave was not granted, that our captain said to me just after we had dropped anchor: "Stevens, I'll pay you an extra pound per week if you will be Assistant Purser. I'm now going ashore to the Office; come with me." When we reached the Office the "Old Man" took from me the brief case I had carried for him, handed to me an imposing "Pass" that would clear me through the dock police and said, "Now clear out and meet me at the ferry at 2 o'clock sharp," and as an apparent afterthought, "Here is a pound note for expenses." I hired myself a Gharry pulled by a native of Colombo and visited the Cinnamon Gardens where I collected as a souvenir a twig from a cinnamon tree which twig, after some 45 years, I still have. In due course I met the "Old Man" as directed and was told to hold the Pass until he asked for its return, which he never did. That Pass ensured my clearance ashore or aboard again, whatever were the shore leave arrangements for the remainder of the ship's company, during the remainder of my service in *Wiltshire*.

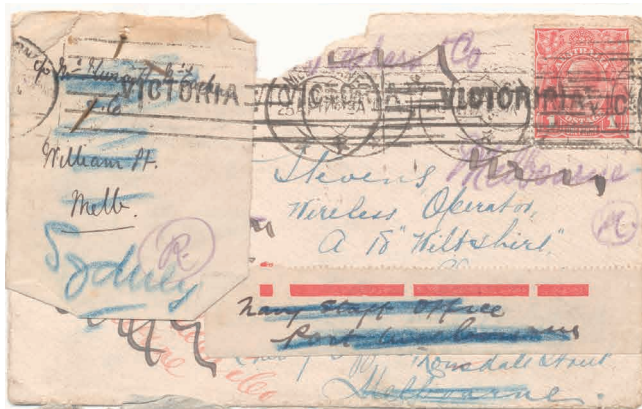
Coal at Colombo was brought aboard the ship from lighters, in small baskets, carried on the heads of many natives. From a distance the stream of natives, up one single plank and down another, gave a distinct appearance of an ant's nest. Day and night coaling proceeded; but all too soon, once more, we were at sea, now heading for the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

I had been led to believe that the Red Sea was always dangerously hot. Certainly one would not have said that the weather was cool; on the other hand, however, wearing tropical kit as we did, there was some pleasure to be gained from the bright sunshine. Working as the two wireless officers were, 6 hours on and 6 hours off, one was usually sufficiently tired to sleep through at least one full watch below.

We spent very little time at Suez. There was time,







however, for mail to be collected from the Office and to post mail written during the voyage. At Suez I received a letter written by my family in Melbourne and which had been following our ship for months; there was barely a clear space on either side of the envelope, which had been re-addressed nine times.

At Suez there was fitted over the bows of the ship a searchlight that would be used at night as we travelled along the Suez Canal. Twice we stopped to allow a southbound steamer to pass us; twice we passed an Australian Army camp close to the eastern bank of the Canal, and on these occasions there was much shouting and cheering, particularly when our fifty or more Nursing Sisters lined the ship's rail and waved to the "boys" ashore.

The ship was soon cleared of Army personnel when we arrived at Port Said. No doubt some of the Army "boys" found their ways to forward lines; no doubt some of the Sisters found their way to the privations and hardships of field hospitals. Perhaps some were lucky and were sent to Convalescent Camps. As ships that pass in the night so did we – we of the RAN and they of the Army – meet, greet, and pass from each the other's ken for all time.

We remained at anchor in Port Said [for] a month. Each two or three days a small steamer came alongside and loaded frozen meat for transportation to Army establishments elsewhere. Reasonable shore leave was granted but, as on other occasions, money was in short supply. Two or three of us, which in retrospect I now see with horror, swam in the harbour. Sometimes we swam to other ships at anchor nearby and exchanged "yarns" with equally bored and inactive crew members; some times we visited the city of Port Said and bought souvenirs and took the thick gravy-like coffee that was offered on street cafes; sometimes we strolled on the hot sands of Egypt and longed for the day when we would, once again, be at sea and reasonably occupied. This day finally came and with it several train loads of Australian soldiers for return to their home-

land on leave. We were again in ballast, which consisted of several hundreds of tons of Egypt's sand which had been lightered out to the ship and poured into our holds.

The run back through the Suez Canal was marred by a severe sand storm that lasted for several hours. Everything in the ship was coated with sand; it was in our beds, in our wireless gear and in our food but we were homeward bound.

As we passed Hell's Gate one evening after sunset and near Aden we saw an Australian hospital ship fully lighted and with the usual illuminated green band around the hull and red crosses on her sides. We were running in complete darkness, which accentuated the bright lights of the hospital ship. We were told that the ship had stopped for a burial at sea.

During the run across from Aden to Colombo where we again coaled I was, as usual, one morning about 2:15 am having tea and biscuits in the starboard cab of the Bridge with the 2nd Mate and with long leads on my headphones. The night was dark and overcast but the sea was smooth and there was little wind. The 2nd Mate and I, despite our differences in ages (I at this time being about 18 years and he about 50) had become talking partners. He told me of marine navigation and of his earlier life in sailing ships while I, with limited knowledge of the subject, told him something of life in Australia, which I discovered he liked very much and which he compared favourably with his native Wales. Suddenly the 2nd Mate, in the flash of an eye, dashed to the engine room telegraph and ordered the starboard engine from full ahead to full astern and at the same time ordered the helm hard over. For a moment I was completely oblivious to the reason for the commotion but I was not long left in doubt. As I glanced seaward I saw a black object slightly blacker than the night but with a patch of white at one end. Another ship, also travelling without lights, slid past us with but inches to spare. No other ship should have been within miles of that position and travelling on an opposing track to ours; opposite moving sea traffic were required to follow pre-determined and well-separated tracks. It was concluded, without evidence other than that which I have mentioned, that we luckily escaped collision with an enemy raider. Within seconds the two ships had met, but without greeting, and passed on into the night. Of course the "Old Man" was advised immediately of the occurrence and soon appeared on the Bridge but all danger was now passed. That 2nd Mate certainly was keeping a strict lookout during that early morning watch. Credit would also be due to the Quartermaster, who immediately answered



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.



Certificate P. No. 41

PROVISIONAL CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY  
IN RADIOTELEGRAPHY.

Granted by the Minister for Navy.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that Mr. *Frederick W. Stevens*  
has been examined in Radiotelegraphy, and his knowledge is as  
follows:--

- (a) The adjustment of apparatus and knowledge of its working... *Fair Practical knowledge*
- (b) Transmission and sound-reading at a speed of not less than 20 words a minute... *Excellent*
- (c) Knowledge of the regulations applicable to the exchange of radiotelegraphic traffic... *Fair*

The candidate was tested on a *1 1/2* *Marconi* Set of apparatus.

It is also hereby certified that the holder has made a legal declaration that he will preserve the secrecy of correspondence.

Signature of Certifying Officer

*William Gosker*

*H. G. Crosswell* Director of Wireless Telegraphy, Royal  
Radio Commander R.A.N. Australian Naval Radio Service, Melbourne.

JAN 26 1917

(Date).

Signature of Holder

*F. W. Stevens*

Date of Birth

*3rd January 1898*

Place of Birth

*Camberwell*





S.S. "Wiltshire" A-18  
 Sydney.  
 20 December 1917

This is to certify that the  
 Bearer. Mr. F. W. Stevens has  
 served as 2<sup>nd</sup> wireless operator on  
 the above named ship from.

14<sup>th</sup> February 1917 to above date.

During this time he has  
 always been most attentive to his  
 duties, strictly sober & in every way  
 most willing & courteous.

He leaves now at his own wish  
 to take up a land appointment.

B. Hayward.  
 Master. A-18



the helm order, and the Engineer below, who so promptly answered his orders from the Bridge.

After short stops at Colombo, Fremantle (Perth) and Outer Harbour (Adelaide), we arrived back at Melbourne where I was instructed to report immediately to the responsible authority ashore. Fearing the worst and wondering very much why I was being summoned before the “big brass” I quickly greeted my mother and sister, who were at the wharf, and made my way to town. Very much to my surprise I was told that I had certain special qualifications that were being wasted at sea and could be put to better use ashore; would I agree to signing off the ship immediately. Although I could not lightly turn down an opportunity to transfer to a shore job, I was quite happy at sea and in any event I had been treated very well by the Captain of *Wiltshire* and felt I should give him an opportunity to advise me. Captain Heyward advised me to take the offered shore appointment but declined to clear me until the ship arrived in Sydney, and this was agreed. At this time my father was in charge of the lighthouse at Wilsons Promontory, the southernmost tip of Australia. My father and I both were well experienced in semaphore signalling and, by agreement with Captain Heyward, I “yarned” to my father for almost two hours as we approached, passed, and travelled away from the Promontory. I did not have an opportunity to again see my mother before we left Melbourne for Sydney; therefore my father, isolated as he was at the remote lighthouse, knew of my impending shore appointment ahead of the remainder of my family.

There was some misgivings in my mind that I was to leave the sea which life I had always craved for and which at one time I thought I might adopt on a permanent basis. Some of the other ship’s officers were very outspoken in their beliefs that this was an opportunity that should not be missed at any cost; some were openly envious that I, still a youth, should be given such an opportunity.

Soon after passing Cliffy Island 20 miles on the Sydney side of Wilsons Promontory we ran into fog. During my time at sea we had experienced heat and cold, rain,

sleet and, in the English Channel, snow; fine weather and foul; green seas over the bow, and glassy surfaces; gales and calms; but not until now on the last leg of my time at sea did I experience fog. We slowed down with the fog siren blaring at close intervals and “felt” our way along, past Cape Everard and onward towards Gabo Island. Giving Gabo a wide berth the ship was turned northward towards Sydney but it was not until this time, some 20 hours later, that we ran out of the “pea souper” and into a starlit early morning.

As we approached Sydney Heads I packed my gear in readiness to sign off the ship and, in the language of the sailor, “swallow the anchor”. My real regret at leaving the ship and the shipmates with whom I had gone through a few rather trying times was made worse by the kindly words spoken to me by the “Old Man” and by the written and unsolicited testimonial signed personally by himself that he gave to me. I looked back as a motor boat took me ashore from No. 1 buoy where I had first sighted the old *Wiltshire* a couple of years earlier and wondered if I should see the ship again. I never did see her again but as will be seen later, and by a strange coincidence, I did communicate with the ship by radio.

HMAT A18 saw out what was left of the 1914–1918 war, carrying troops to war, carrying walking casualties back to Australia and carrying foodstuffs overseas to distant countries. Subsequent to the cessation of hostilities, HMAT A18 became again the TSS *Wiltshire*. She did not, however, have long to live. She ran ashore on Great Barrier Island outside New Zealand’s Auckland Harbour and became a total wreck, with Captain Hayward still in command and a few of the crew that I knew still in her. The total crew and one stowaway, after suffering considerable privations and after seeing the after-portion of the ship break away and sink into deep water, were eventually taken ashore by means of the breeches buoy type of lifesaving equipment.

Finally the fore-part of the ship was washed away and nothing but memories were left of the *Wiltshire* or of A18. RIP.





## 1918, A Quiet Rest

[This memoir was written in about 1965. The “organisation” Fred refers to is the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV), which he joined after his retirement from DCA in 1963. The event related here probably took place in early 1918. Fred’s father, George, had retired in 1923 but relieved lighthouse keepers as needed until 1943 (he died in 1944). Records of George’s employment ceased in 1915, when control of Victorian lighthouses passed to the Commonwealth, and relief assignments were not recorded anyway. Fred married Cecily in 1923 and would not have abandoned her for a holiday with his parents, especially as their first son, Richard (Dick) was born in 1924, and in 1925 they moved to Brisbane. So it likely that this story dates to early 1918.]

I was relieving at the counter. Normally my work involved research for the touring organisation [RACV] that employed me. The Christmas vacation was approaching and I, with several others from various branches of the organisation, had been detailed to assist those who were planning holiday tours. Some wanted advice on camping areas; some wanted accommodation bookings, while some wanted advice on “where to go for a quiet rest”.

At this time the weather was hot and humid. It was one of those unusual days in Melbourne when the weather resembled that found along the north Queensland coast in summer before the cooling rains fall. The counter was busy. Each lift that arrived at our floor disgorged more enquiring tourists in the making. As each visitor was attended to, whatever he asked for, there came to mind one query – “where to go for a quiet rest”.

Long years ago my father, and indeed his father before him, had been a lighthouse keeper. Between them they had served at most lighthouses on the Victorian coast – Cape Nelson, Cape Otway, Wilsons Promontory, Clifly Island, and others. My brother, my sister and myself had also lived at these isolated settlements and grew to the age when it was necessary to go out into the world and find a job. There was a war on at the time and the Royal Australian Navy seemed to me to be allied with lighthouses and therefore attractive as a means of earning my living. Patriotism did not enter my head; all that I wanted to do was to “keep the wolf from the door”. In due course the War ended and at that stage “somewhere to go for a quiet rest” was what I needed.

At the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse it was, and still is, the practice to send from Melbourne once each three months the lighthouse steamer with heavy stores

and, when necessary, a change of personnel. It was the steamer *Lady Loch* that provided this service then. Between visits of the *Loch*, as she was familiarly known, a weekly supply of fresh meat, a pound or two of butter, a bag of mail and newspapers were brought from Melbourne by one of the small steamers – the *Wyrallah*, the *Queenscliffe* or perhaps the *Despatch* that traded to the Gippsland Lakes. On mail day a special look-out was kept for the steamer. As soon as she poked her nose through “Little Bourke Street” to the westward two or three miles distant, [from] the first person to sight her, be it man or boy, a great shout would go up: “Wywup!”, which was a contraction of *Wyrallah* and meant the particular supply ship of the day. “Wywup” was the signal to drop everything and for the boat’s crew to hasten to the landing, lower the boat, proceed alongside the steamer and bring back the “goodies”, which sometimes included a packet of lollies for the children. Sometimes a couple of crayfish would be handed to the captain for his supper.

Nineteen miles to the eastward of Wilsons Promontory is Clifly Island. Usually, if the weather was favourable, “Wywup” would call there too. Sometimes, however, the weather was far from favourable and in these circumstances supplies would be carried on to the Gippsland Lakes and, if possible, landed when the steamer was returning towards Melbourne several days later. Sometimes the “fresh” meat was, of necessity, thrown overboard, but the mail was carried back and forth until it could finally be delivered.

At the time I decided to go somewhere “for a quiet rest”, my family was stationed at Clifly Island.

One morning I joined the old *Queenscliffe* at her berth far up the Yarra River and before the Spencer Street Bridge forced all seagoing vessels to berth lower down the river. The *Queenscliffe* was a sturdy little steamer of about 300 tons burden. She was essentially a cargo-carrier but was equipped with two bunks which were available for passengers. These bunks were on either side of the officers’ dining saloon and ran fore and aft adjacent to the dining table. One slept on the bunks at night and sat upon them at mealtimes.

We slid slowly down the Yarra River and headed via the west channel towards the Heads. There was quite a “chop” on in the Rip, so the captain decided to anchor off Sorrento for a few hours until the ebb tide slackened and a safe passage through the Rip could be accomplished. I was enjoying my sleep on the following morning when the cook-steward roused me out as he wanted to set the table for breakfast. We were off Cape



Schanck at this time and rolling in a steady swell from the south. Soon after lunch we tied up for an hour or two at Waratah Bay to discharge stores for the lime-kiln workers that were employed there then.

As daylight faded that evening and night crept across the sky, steady rain began to fall. There was no protection on the deck of the old *Queenscliffe*. I, the one and only passenger, had no alternative to climbing down the almost vertical ladder to the “dining saloon” and, under the fitful light of a smoking oil lamp, wait for the arrival at Wilsons Promontory. Soon we cleared “Little Bourke Street” and I could imagine the call “Wywup!” going up at the lighthouse and the running feet as the boat’s crew hastened to the landing. Soon the mailbag and a parcel of stores had been lowered into the lighthouse boat and we were on our way again towards Cliffy Island.

During my earlier years, and while I was at sea myself, I had become quite familiar with the Morse lamp and other means of signalling between ship and shore. As we approached Cliffy Island in darkness and rain I noticed a Morse lamp in operation near the lighthouse and attempted to read the signals. However, the rain and the motion of the little steamer made this quite difficult, so much so that I misread an important word. The message I received was “Hope Fred will get better.” Reference to “getting better” intrigued me as I had been quite well and was thoroughly enjoying the sea voyage. The message I was supposed to receive was “Hope Fred will get butter.” There had been no delivery

of stores at Cliffy Island during several weeks and all butter on the island had been exhausted. Bread, which was home-made, and dripping, together with local fish, was the staple diet.

Naturally my folk were glad to see me, butter-less as I was, and I to see them. There was much to talk about and the necessary fish to be caught. I had I gone to Cliffy Island hoping to remain there for three weeks but this was not to be. On the tenth day there were obvious indications of bad weather developing and indeed already there was a long swell running in from the south while a westerly wind was quickly building up a choppy sea. Once the weather turns “sour” at Cliffy Island, any chance of landing on the island or leaving it is extremely remote. It so happened that on that day the *Wyrallah*, en route from Melbourne to Bairnsdale, was due to pass Cliffy Island and, it was hoped, unload much needed stores. As I had a Job to go to in Melbourne it was decided that, if a boat could put off from the Island when the *Wyrallah* arrived, I should join her rather than risk an enforced wait and perhaps jeopardise my job. With some sadness at leaving “home” again so soon, and with some difficulty in getting the boat away, I said farewell and climbed aboard the *Wyrallah*.

By comparison with the *Queenscliffe*, *Wyrallah* was an oceangoing liner. She was of about 500 tons burden, had four 2-berth cabins and a small but real dining saloon.

## 1918–1921, Samarai Island, New Guinea

My return by train to Melbourne, after the long voyages at sea, seemed dull by comparison. The home folk were glad to see me and I was glad to see them and to meet again relatives and friends that I had not seen for many months. I could not, however, shake off a feeling that I had deserted a good team, a happy ship, and a job of work that I seemed fitted to do. If, however, the authorities believed that there was something else that I could do better perhaps it was not for me to judge.

Soon after retuning to Melbourne I reported to the Office and was advised that, had I not been delayed through the trip to Sydney, I was to have been drafted to a coastal radio station at Esperance in Western Australia. However, as I was too late for that draft I was now, as soon as transportation could be arranged, to proceed to a similar station at Samarai in Papua. In the meantime I was to take up temporary duty at the Melbourne Coastal Radio Station after working off two weeks' leave that was due to me.

During my first watch at Melbourne I "stood by" for familiarisation with the local equipment and shore procedures. On the second day of shore duty I was pronounced fit to take a solo watch, which I commenced at 5 pm and would continue until relieved at 11 pm. Although there was not strict wireless silence on the Australian coast at that stage of the war, messages to and from ships at sea were nevertheless kept to a minimum consistent with essential requirements. Certain routine messages, in code, were transmitted at pre-arranged times and usually addressed to the collective call sign ABMV, which represented "All British Merchant Vessels". These messages would be received by ships at sea but not acknowledged. Other routine transmissions included time signals, which were used for precision checking of ships' chronometers for navigational purposes.

All was quiet. I was eating a meal of sandwiches and drinking thermos tea but still keeping a good watch as but recently required at sea. Somewhat relaxed I was thinking of ships at sea and in particular of *Wiltshire*. Suddenly there was a call; I was receiving my first call from a ship at sea in my position of a Coastal Radio Station operator. I had no need to look in the large list of confidential call signs to identify the ship that was calling me; of many strange things that could happen, this first call from a ship at sea to me in my new shore position, surely the strangest of all would be that the ship was *Wiltshire*. It was truly *Wiltshire* then en route from Sydney to parts unknown (to me) but which I reasonably assumed, and later confirmed, was to Lon-

don and to home for many of the crew members that I knew.

Six weeks went by. There was no further advice regarding my move to Samarai; apparently I had been forgotten, but this was not so. There had been, unknown to me, some difficulty in obtaining a passage for me on the small steamers that made 3-weekly visits to Papua. In due course I was advised to be ready to depart two days hence, which meant hurried packing and good-bye visits to friends and relations. I could expect to be absent for three years or more.

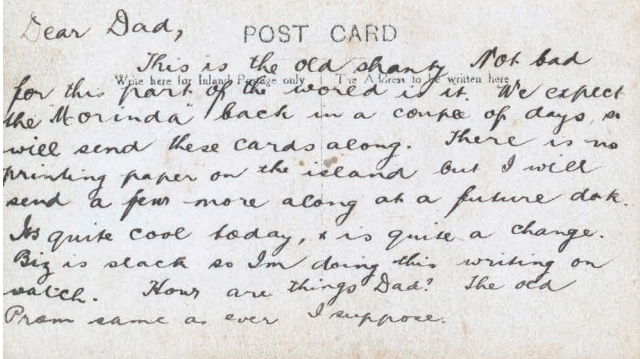
I found the *Morinda*, the steamer in which I was to travel to Papua, without difficulty in Sydney; she was tied up near Pyrmont Bridge and was already fully loaded with merchandise for delivery to Papua and New Guinea ports. In stalls, on deck, were a dozen cows which would be put over the side at Gilli Gilli in Milne Bay and swum ashore. Passengers had already begun to settle in on the ship when I arrived alongside.

*Morinda* was not a large steamer. Indeed, a large steamer could not operate at some of the ports in Papua New Guinea. At Woodland Island, for example, there was barely sufficient clearance for the *Morinda*, once she had entered the port, to be warped around with her head to sea again. Passenger accommodation was mostly flush with the main deck adjoining the dining saloon. It could almost be said that one could step out of bed alongside the dining table. At the forward end of the dining saloon three or four port-holes opened on to the main deck where the cattle was quartered. There was a small lounge on the next deck above the saloon and a tiny library. These, and the rather cramped boat deck, did not cater particularly well for the passengers who would spend most of the next fortnight in the ship.

We pulled out about noon, threaded our way through the various Sydney Harbour ferries, and were soon on course for Brisbane, our first port of call. After my experiences in *Wiltshire*, *Morinda* was a small ship indeed as I found when we ran into a rough patch of weather that evening. Soon passengers were seasick. I, on the other hand, thoroughly enjoyed the ship's tumbling about. As perhaps might be anticipated I paid a visit to the wireless office and made the acquaintance of the sole wireless officer.

At Brisbane we tied up at the Pinkenba wharf, where we took on a few Queensland passengers, their baggage, and a small quantity of cargo. As we would be at Brisbane but a few hours there was not sufficient time





Postcard from Fred to his father, 1918, showing the Samarai telegraph station.



Fred as the wireless operator, Samarai, 1918.

to visit the city but rather did some of us take a stroll ashore. I visited the Brisbane Coastal Radio Station, which then was located quite close to the wharf.

From Brisbane we headed north for Cairns, inside the Great Barrier Reef, as I had done as far as Townsville in *Wiltshire* a year earlier. Although the war was still proceeding in Europe and although there were men in uniform, ready to go to, or having returned from the seat of war, there was little evidence in *Morinda* that a war was still being fought. There was no black-out in the ship as she proceeded up the Queensland coast, and this in itself was relaxing after long periods of travelling in black-outs in the war zones.

As we came abeam of Sandy Cape at the northern extremity of Fraser Island, a steamer to the eastward flying distress signals was sighted from the Bridge. *Morinda* was headed towards the distress call vessel, which we soon found was a Japanese cargo steamer. The officers of our ship tried to communicate with the *Ujana Maru*, as the Japanese vessel proved to be, but couldn't make themselves understood.

The Second Officer with a boat's crew went over to *Ujana Maru* and discovered that, although she could steam, her rudder post had collapsed, as a result of which she could not be steered. She did not carry wireless and had, therefore, been wallowing about in the sea for several days before we sighted her. After quite considerable difficulty a line was secured between the two ships, our ship astern of the other to act as "rudder", we headed for the quieter waters inside Sandy Cape, and awaited arrival of a tug from Brisbane that we had summoned by wireless. The towline parted several times before we had the ship in safe waters, which occupied the most of two days and a night. I volunteered to assist with either the visual signalling or wireless watch keeping and my voluntary aid was accepted. In due course, when salvage of the Japanese steamer was recognised and the Captain, Officers and crew of *Morinda* each shared proportionately to their status in payments, I was but a passenger and received nothing for my labours.

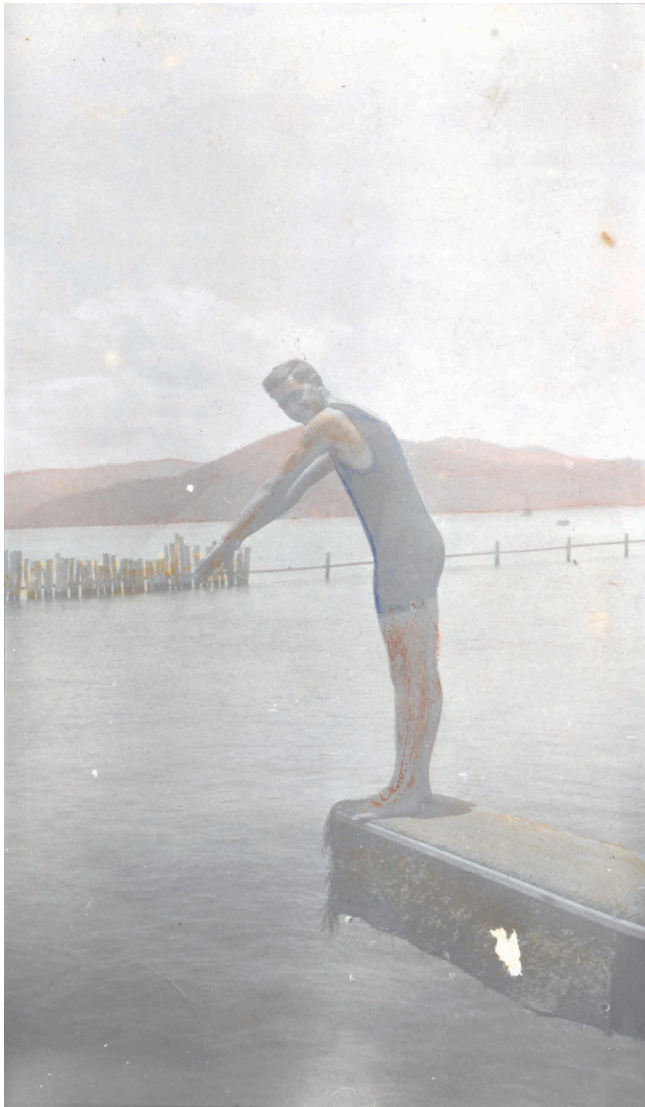
Having handed over the *Ujana Maru* to the tug that duly arrived, we headed again northward, now two days behind schedule. At Cairns we picked up still a few more passengers although, at this stage, all sleeping accommodation was occupied. The newcomers were given settees in the dining saloon upon which to sleep and curtained areas for dressing.

I was perhaps not as impressed with the tropical scenery of Cairns as I might have been if, recently, I had not seen the Cinnamon Gardens of Colombo and the





Fred going up the radio mast, Samarai, 1918. He had no fear of heights.



At the swimming baths in Samarai Harbour, 1918.



Samarai Harbour, 1918.



The swimming baths, Samarai Harbour, 1918.



jungle of Sierra Leone. Cairns was hot and humid and very different from what I saw and experienced there three years later when I was returning south from Samarai.

The run across the Coral Sea, flat calm and sparkling in the tropical moonlight by night and sunlight by day, was quite uneventful. As there was little space for the usual shipboard deck games, too much time was spent in eating and sleeping; we soon became very lazy. A very spic and span Customs boat crew and an even more spic and span and white uniformed Customs Officer came aboard at Port Moresby; there was also the usual Port Doctor to ensure that we were not bringing into Papua smallpox or other such dreaded complaints from Australia. Port Moresby, the administrative capital of Papua, was already a busy little town where most men left manual labour to natives and where most wives left the housework, the laundry and the care of their small children to “house boys”, “laundry boys” and others with similar distinguishing designations. Ten shillings, a bag of rice, a tin or two of preserved meat (known by the natives as bulla-ma-cow) and a stick of “native” tobacco was then considered to be reasonable monthly payment for each boy.

From Port Moresby we skirted the south coast of Papua and arrived at Samarai one early morning. Samarai was really a trading post for plantations on the mainland and outlying islands. Each three weeks, when the steamer from the south was due to arrive with mail, fresh butter and meat, general cargo and passengers, sailing vessels from plantations – Gilli Gilli, Sudea, Doini etc. – and from Mission Stations at Dobodura, Quato and others, would converge on Samarai, spend a day or two there unloading copra for shipment south and loading provisions and depart again until next a steamer was expected.

Samarai is quite a small island; within about fifteen minutes it is possible to walk completely around the track that circles the island. The resident population rested at about 70 all told, but at steamer time and for a day or two around that event the floating population could grow to a figure around 500. There were three hotels which were depended upon by many of the residents for regular accommodation, three European general stores, a bank, a Post Office, a 6-bed hospital and something of the order of 50 houses. There were native thatched houses and a native jail, a tennis court and a rather inadequately prepared but reasonably safe swimming pool. The means of communication with the outside world was wireless telegraphy, and it was for the purpose of operating the Wireless Station that I had been sent to Samarai.

Associated with the Wireless Station was a small self-contained flat – a small kitchen fitted with a wood-burning stove and a “sink”, wooden table, a small dresser, and a small bed-sitting room fitted in shipboard fashion with a “bunk”. Later during my sojourn at Samarai I moved into the flat and remained there, preparing my meals and caring for myself without the aid of the traditional “cook boy” and “house boy” and “laundry boy”.

Immediately upon my arrival ashore at Samarai I reported to the Officer in Charge of the Wireless Station, who was then the only member of the staff, and sought advice as to when he expected me to report for duty. The reply to my question was quite definite: “No time like the present” was his immediate response. I was soon shown how to start the petrol engine that drove the electrical generating equipment and soon introduced to the routine of the job and almost immediately left alone in some bewilderment. In *Wiltshire* I had already experienced a boss that was very retiring by nature but by comparison my new boss could be likened unto a Tibetan monk. Sometimes three weeks could pass without the exchange of a spoken word between myself and this new boss. Occasionally this tense state of affairs would be broken when the boss would open a conversation, talk for an hour or more then, suddenly and without warning, say, “Goodnight,” and go again into seclusion. Finally this boss developed serious eye troubles and was evacuated to Sydney for specialist treatment, leaving me as my own boss and the sole wireless operator on the island until relief was provided some months later.

I developed a friendship with a storekeeper who owned a sailing lugger, and in this little ship, the *Dove*, we occasionally visited Milne Bay during Saturday afternoon and returned home Sunday evening. These were extremely pleasant and relaxing short sea voyages and during which it was often possible to obtain a supply of native vegetables – sweet potatoes, taros, yams and the like.

As all residents on the island could normally obtain fresh food only when the 3-weekly steamer from Sydney arrived, I started a small fowl run and soon was able to supply my kitchen and the kitchen of some special friends with fresh eggs and poultry. This was an interesting and useful hobby. It was particularly interesting as I watched my chickens, so to speak, from the cradle to the grave; I hatched the chickens, tended them, and finally turned some of them into Sunday dinners and, at the same time, added to my popularity with the friends. I played a little tennis, I swam, and I was able to take some interest in local affairs. During





one period of my life at Samarai, while the hospital nursing staff was almost non-existent and when a couple of urgent surgical cases were being handled by the local Medical Officer, I was dressed in mask and gown and introduced to the mysteries of a hospital operating theatre. I found these experiences most interesting and somewhat rewarding as, in each incident with which I was associated, there was complete recovery on the part of the patients; I soon recovered too!

During my first year at Samarai I was unhappy and discontented with my isolated lot but, as I was still under RAN discipline (be that discipline as it was in my own hands), I could not but suffer and look for the day when I should be relieved. I was there when the 1914–1918 war armistice was signed and I was on watch when advice of this development came to hand. As had been previously arranged I, upon receiving this advice, immediately went to the local church and wildly rang the church bell and sparked off a day of great rejoicing on the island.

During my second year on the island, having now collected a number of friends and become more interested in local affairs, I settled down and slowly became a local inhabitant and a piece of the local furniture. The three years I spent at Samarai finally came to an end and when the day came to again join the *Morinda* and steam south, it was with considerable regret that I packed my bags, gave my chickens to a friend and said my farewells, but promising to return someday,

En route to Sydney, as was usual, the ship called at Cairns once again. On this occasion the weather was dull and unseasonal rain was falling. As we were to spend a full day at Cairns, arrangements were made to charter a special train for a visit to the Barron Falls. Up and still further up the hills behind Cairns the train

Dear Dad. There's a very unexpected mail going out in about 20 minutes by the H.M.S. "Suva" with Jellicoe aboard. She is dropping and picking up a mail which we did not know about till just now. Excuse brevity & haste but this is just to let you know I'm good oh & hope you are the same. I'm sending this to the Prom [Wilson's Promontory] but if you have left it will be forwarded I suppose.

All is excitement here with prospect of a mail after 8 weeks without. Peace news & excitement is good too. Tell you all about it later. Best of good wishes

Contents of postcard to Fred's father, 1918. Note reference to Admiral Lord Jellicoe.

## GENERAL HINTS.

### FURNISHINGS FOR PAPUA.

F. W. Stevens, writing from the Radio Station at Samarai, Papua, sends the following information for the benefit of a correspondent who inquired some little time ago about suitable furnishings for a home in Papua:—"Curtains—Very few windows, mainly glass doors. Curtains for the latter, something that will wash easily and frequently. Cushions—Pillow cushions are popular, with fancywork cover that will wash. Unwashable cushion covers are very seldom seen. Furniture—As much cane furniture as possible, a couple of large lounges, and smaller cane chairs. For dining-room bentwood chairs. House generally consist of two or three rooms, about 14 x 12, or thereabouts, with a 12ft. verandah all round the rooms. Cane blinds are hung round the verandah. These are pulled up at night. Rooms are used for dressing in mainly. The verandah is most commonly used for sleeping and dining. Mosquito nets are essential in most places in Papua, especially in the bush. I have not used one in 20 months in Samarai, and have had no fever to speak of."

Letter to the editor of the Melbourne *Argus*, 17 December 1919.



A "native house", not to be confused with a "native's house", 1919.



"Natives working cargo", Port Moresby, 1918.



## Samarai Chamber of Commerce.

(From our Correspondent.)

The monthly meeting of Samarai Chamber of Commerce was held in the School of Arts on August 19. There were present: Mr F. N. Paris (Chairman) and Messrs Wood, MacSmith, Garlick, Johns, Izod, Heath, Middleton, Higginson, Fowler, Spiller, Stevens, and Rogerson.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

The following new members were elected: Messrs A. L. Dick (Sagarai Plantation), D. A. Fowler (Bank of New South Wales), F. W. Stevens (Wireless).

In regard to repairs to Samarai Wharf, the following motion was carried: That the Government be advised that the grant of £100 had been found to be insufficient, and that they be requested to grant a further amount to cover the necessary repairs.

Mr Rogerson was appointed Acting Secretary in the absence of Mr Frame, who has gone South on holiday.

The Chamber passed a motion expressing regret at losing Mr Heath, our genial bank-manager, wishing him success and good health in his new appointment, and welcoming his successor (Mr Fowler).

This terminated the business of the meeting.

Minutes of a meeting of the Samarai Chamber of Commerce, *Papuan Courier*, 3 September 1919.



Fred in his Naval uniform at the Samarai telegraph station, 1919.

crawled, over many short bridges and through many short tunnels until we reached the falls. Some of us left the train there and explored while the train and the remainder of the passengers went on to Kuran-da. This was prior to the hydroelectric harnessing of the Barron River and when the falls, after heavy rain, could be seen at their best. We spent a damp but pleasant day on the hills behind Cairns, returning to the ship in time for dinner and departure soon thereafter for Brisbane and Sydney with, finally, a passage in the old *Bombala* from Sydney to Melbourne and to home again. Soon after my return to Melbourne, the Coastal Radio Service was transferred from RAN control to private enterprise, and at this juncture I was discharged from the Navy and once again wore civilian clothes which, after some five years in uniform, I had to purchase. I returned to the Melbourne Coastal





Samarai town from the top of the radio mast, December 1918. All of this was razed in 1942 by order of Australian command for fear it would fall into Japanese hands.

Radio Station and took up where I had left off 5 years previously. I did, however, liquidate 94 days' leave that had accrued during my Samarai service.



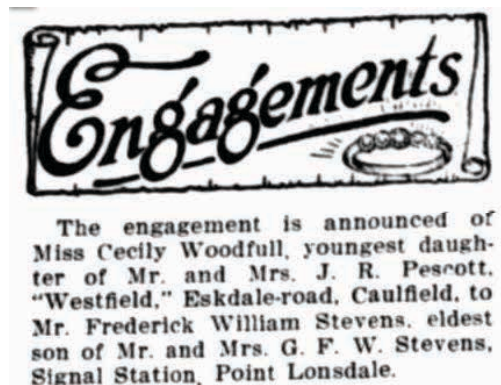
The winners of the native canoe race, Samarai Harbour, New Year's Day 1919.



Postcard from Fred to this mother, Samarai, December 1919.



Start of the whaleboat race, Samarai Harbour, New Year's Day 1919.



Announcement in *Table Talk* magazine 8 April 1921 of Fred's engagement to Cecily. Fred didn't record how they met.



## 1922–1923, Willis Island

It was at about this time that a meteorological observing station was established at Willis Island, some 500 miles east of Cairns. The station was manned in the first instance by a senior officer of the Department of Navigation and two wireless operators. A couple of wooden huts were established, wireless masts [were] erected and associated equipment [was] installed. The party of three men was then left alone, with provisions, for six months. During the following winter a caretaker and one wireless operator manned the station. Volunteers were then called for to man the station during the next cyclone season – October to March – as no cyclone had been experienced there in the meantime



Willis Island, 1922. One of Fred's colleagues and the pet dog with a leatherback turtle.

**CYCLONE SEASON.**

**WILLIS ISLAND WATCH.**

Three young men have voluntarily decided to live a Robinson Crusoe existence for six months on lonely Willis Island in order to give timely wireless warnings to Queensland of the approach of dreaded cyclones. The leader of the party is Mr. Kempling, who hails from the radio station at Cooktown, and his two companions are Messrs. J. Hogan, of the meteorological office in Melbourne, and F. W. Stevens, of the Melbourne radio station. Messrs. Hogan and Stevens left Brisbane in the Wyreema last night for Townsville, where they will be joined by Mr. Kempling. A working party of 15 men will also proceed to Willis Island to concrete the tower in which the wireless and meteorological instruments are housed. When the work is completed the working party, together with Mr. Stevens, who has resided on the island during the winter months, will return to Townsville.

Meteorological observation work will be undertaken by Mr. Hogan, who will also devote some of his time to upper air research work which has been carried out in Melbourne for some time past. Messrs. Kempling and Stevens will devote themselves to sending and receiving wireless messages. They are both expert operators.

Brisbane Daily Mail 18 October 1922.

and further tests of living conditions through a cyclone was necessary. I responded to the advertisement and was one of the crew of three finally chosen. We travelled by coastal passenger steamer from Melbourne via Sydney, Brisbane and Townsville, once again, to Cairns. At Cairns our small party and 42 cases of provisions were transferred to a small chartered steamer, the *Bopple*, and began the trip to Willis Island.

The island known as Willis is really one of three very small islands forming the Willis Group; it is about 450 yards long, about 150 yards wide and of egg shape,

**CYCLONE WARNINGS**  
**WILLIS ISLAND STATION**

The Commonwealth wireless station established last summer on Willis Island by Captain Davis and a party of experts for the purpose of sending early advices of the approach of cyclones and for other meteorological observation is to be carried on again this season. Mr. Kempling of Cooktown, is to be in charge, and he will have the co-operation of Messrs. J. Hogan and F. W. Stevens, both of Melbourne. The two latter left Brisbane yesterday by the Wyreema for Townsville, where Mr. Kempling will join them. These three officers will have a working party of 15, who will set about the business of concreting the tower in which the apparatus is housed. These men will leave as soon as this work is completed, and they will be accompanied back to the mainland by Mr. Stevens and a companion, who has been taking care of the station since Captain Davis left in April.

Brisbane Telegraph 18 October 1922

**CYCLONE WARNINGS. WILLIS ISLAND STATION.** The Commonwealth wireless station established last summer on Willis Island by Captain Davis and a party of experts for the purpose of sending early advices of the approach of cyclones and for other meteorological observation is to be carried on again this season. Mr. Kempling, of Cooktown, is to be in charge, and he will have the co-operation of Messrs. J. Hogan and F. W. Stevens, both of Melbourne. The two latter left Brisbane yesterday by the Wyreema for Townsville, where Mr. Kempling will join them. These three officers will have a working party of 15, who will set about the business of concreting the tower in which the apparatus is housed. These men will leave as soon as this work is completed, and they will be accompanied back to the mainland by Mr Stevens and a companion, who has been taking care of the station since Captain Davis left in April. messages. They are both expert operators.

and 55 feet above high water. It is almost entirely surrounded by a coral reef; indeed it might be said that Willis Island is a coral island partly above and partly below water level. We were greeted upon arrival, firstly by the winter caretaking crew of two who, naturally, were anxious to receive their first mail for six months and to receive some fresh food. Secondly, we were greeted by thousands of sea birds – masked gannets, brown gannets, sooty terns and noddy terns, and an occasional frigate bird. Some of the birds seemed to be overhead, screeching and calling, continuously. It was hatching time, or would soon be hatching time, as a result of which birds were sitting on eggs in crudely made nests or tending new chicks. There were also mutton birds that riddled the island with burrows in which they lived and reared their young.

During the morning of the day after our arrival at Willis Island we ferried ashore our provisions, saw the *Bopple* depart for the mainland and set about establishing ourselves for the long summer. Our provisions had been packed for us in Melbourne so there was some speculation on the contents of the cases. We found, for example, a number of tinned cakes, tinned puddings, and many other items of food in tins. We discovered that if we rationed our cakes and puddings we could have one cake each three weeks and one pudding each fortnight. There were also bags of flour, some yeast, and what appeared to be hundreds of tins of “bully beef”. In due course I experimented with and finally turned out fresh bread twice per week with, on bread-making days, hot rolls for breakfast. Our small supply of fresh food – a bag of potatoes, some greens and butter – was soon exhausted or, in most cases, turned “bad” before we could use it.

Our daily job commenced at 6 am when weather reports were prepared and transmitted by wireless to the Coastal Radio Station at Cooktown; reports were also sent at 9 am, 5 pm and 9 pm excepting, as proved to be the case twice, that hourly reports were despatched during cyclonic conditions.

Having cleared the early morning weather report it was then our custom to take a swim accompanied by the “family” dog and cat. Contrary to popular belief the cat finally overcame a natural objection to water and swam with the party. Meal preparation was attended to on a roster basis, each of the three men taking a week each in turn. The “cook” would cut short his swim and prepare breakfast while the two other men would leisurely prepare for the day’s work. This work varied from sweeping and dusting their rooms, through repairs to equipment, to painting the wireless masts. There was also the job of digging and



A three-masted lugger that Fred photographed at sea in November 1921.

preparing and finally stocking with emergency rations a dugout for use in an emergency should such arise during the passage of a cyclone. Evenings were usually spent firstly in walking round the island and collecting unusual specimens of coral, watching turtles come ashore to dig a hole in the sand and lay eggs, or resting if a particularly hard working day had preceded that evening. Later there were books to read and, although they would not be posted for many months, letters to write, usually in diary form.

Our first cyclone centre passed some distance from the island and caused little inconvenience; it did, however, give us a foretaste of gale force winds and heavy seas. This particular cyclone did, nevertheless, create havoc elsewhere; it amalgamated with another depression that developed in the Coral Sea, passed across Cape York Peninsula and resulted in the loss of a steamer, the *Douglas Mawson*, with all hands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. There were some unconfirmed reports that a lady passenger and her daughter in *Douglas Mawson* had been captured by aborigines but it would appear from later investigation that this was not so.

Two days ahead of our second cyclone a sea swell from the north-east developed and was accompanied by a falling barometer and, later, an ominous-looking sky. Wind force gradually built up, whereupon we took the planned precautions of tying down everything movable, closing and securing wooden shutters on windows and checking our dugout stores and drinking water. Rain fell in sheets. We did not attempt to sleep; indeed there was little time for rest as the hourly weather reports kept us busy. In the “eye” of the cyclone the wind dropped off to an almost flat calm but it soon swung round and began to blow a gale again from the opposite quarter and continued to do so, gradually moderating, as the cyclone moved away from us and followed a parabolic track off the Queensland coast, finally



## Willis Island.

### .. WAITING FOR CYCLONES.

The steamer *Bopple* brought two members of the Willis Island observers to Townsville after a long summer vigil waiting for possible cyclones. The members of the party were Messrs. G. Kempling and F. W. Stevens, wireless operators, and Mr. J. Hogan, meteorological observer. Mr. Kempling, who was the officer in charge, was previously attached to the Cooktown radio station, whilst Mr. Stevens joined from the Melbourne station, and Mr. Hogan from the head office of the Meteorological Department in Melbourne. Somewhat browned from outdoor life, the party returned in excellent health and spirits, and naturally pleased at the prospects of a holiday in the South, all being due for leave, after their lonely island watch.

Some interesting particulars of life on the Island was given to a Townsville "Bulletin" reporter. Not a day's sickness was experienced, and the only recourse to the medicine chest was in connection with minor accidents, such as bruises or cuts received. So far as the life on the Island is concerned they had not felt the loneliness more than they expected, and with the daily duties time had not hung unduly long, though they had got through pretty well all they could find in the way of reading matter.

Speaking of the weather conditions, Mr. Hogan stated they had not experienced any actual cyclonic conditions at the Island, though conditions pointed to being on the edge of a disturbance on occasions. The worst weather was experienced in March, on 26th and 27th, when a heavy gale blew continuously for the two days. The lowest barometer readings were shown at that time, viz., 29.52 on Monday, 26th March. The climate was a good one for the tropics, hot in the sun, but tempered by the sea breeze. The highest actual temperature was 92 degrees some decimals, and the lowest

between 71 degrees and 72 degrees. The heaviest rain experienced was in April, when 3½ inches were recorded in one night, and the water supply at the station, a tank storage supply of 5000 gallons, was fully replenished. The Island was only 25ft. above sea level, but was protected by a large reef to seaward, on which the heavy ocean seas broke at some considerable distance from the land. The Island was looking at its best when they left, after the recent rains. A rank grass, something like Buffalo grass, covered the whole of the Island, whilst shrubs grew to a height of 3½ft. The vegetation was quickly responsive to rain, and some of the shrubs were coming out in blossom. Of the coconuts which had been planted earlier, four were growing slowly and a dozen young plants were landed from the *Bopple* on her present trip.

The bird life, both officers agreed, was the feature of the Island, as they were there in countless numbers. These included tern of different varieties, gannets, petrel, and other sea-birds. For the most part they were night birds and the noise at night is continuous. One variety, the sooty tern, spent the night hours on the wing, shrieking the whole night long and no matter how the hermits covered their ears and heads the shrill shrieks of the birds still penetrated. This was a mighty concert, with the exception of four nights of heavy gale. The terns are about the size of a pigeon, and each night they spread out in one long line across the Island, facing the wind, and shrieking their defiance. It was one of the noises the members of the party got used to, and after a time could sleep through the concert quite well. Another peculiar bird was one they called the mutton bird, but which is actually the wedge-tailed petrel. These were underground dwellers, spending the day in burrows on the Island, which is riddled with their homes. At night the birds came out and sitting on the beaches filled the air with the most weird and dismal cries. At times it was like a child crying, then again like a cat mewling or a dog complaining, but

all the time miserable, and at dawn they were always "going their hardest." There are some varieties of land birds on the land, but these are very weak-winged and merely flutter from place to place and do not make sustained flights.

The members of the party were fairly well off for fish, and used generally to catch bonito, or a small red fish very much like schnapper. On the reef some very beautiful colored fish are to be seen, one sky blue variety being especially beautiful. Amongst the growing coral on the reef the colored fish made a beautiful picture. Though sharks were often seen off the beach, this did not prevent a daily sea bath, and none of the party ever met with a mishap.

The wireless officers, of course, had to stand certain watches at regular hours, whilst Mr. Hogan had his meteorological observations to record. One of his duties, by the way, was the daily despatch of a balloon to test the air currents in the upper atmosphere, the balloon sometimes remaining in sight for an hour, and at other times disappearing in clouds in a few minutes. Household duties, of course, occupied a certain portion of the day, and all the party attained a useful knowledge in the cooking line during their residence on the Island. For recreations they had ready-fishing and exploring on their limited area, whilst they had indoor games, such as draughts, and Mr. Stevens admitted to having done a little sketching during his spare hours. The previous party had also laid down a tennis court of a sort, which was put in some sort of order, and tennis games served to pass the time occasionally.

The last fortnight has been the most tedious time experienced by the three officers, as they have been in daily expectations of hearing of the departure of the boat which was to relieve them, and the sundry delays by weather and other reasons, were rather trying. They finally left the Island at 3.25 p.m. on Saturday last, and had a good trip over. They leave by the *Wyreema* for South.

Mackay Daily Mercury 15 May 1923

dispersing between New Caledonia and New Zealand.

We did not have real cause to use our dugout although, for some hours, we lived there for experience. Overall results achieved did prove within all reasonable possibilities that it was safe for a party to live on Willis Island throughout any cyclone. In due course the Willis Island meteorological station became a permanent institution and converted from a six months job to a yearly job. Manning of this station is now, normally, on a yearly basis but the unit is periodically visited by a lighthouse tender and is supplied a little more frequently with provisions.

Our term at Willis Island was drawing to a close and glad we were that this should be so. It is noteworthy, however, that on no occasion during our isolation from normal amenities and thrown so closely together as we three men were, never did a fight of any conse-

quence develop. On the rare occasions when tempers ran a little warm, and before the tempers boiled over, we divided ourselves, one man to the northern end of the island, one man to the southern end, and one man, usually the rostered cook, at the centre of the island. After an hour or so of this real isolation we were generally ready to carry on with the day's work in harmony. I vividly recall that one of our bitterest arguments surrounded the pronunciation of a word. The word was "horizon"; was it correctly "ho-ri'-zon", or was it "horizon"?, which shows how easily, in those circumstances, an upsetting fight could be sparked off.

The *Bopple* that was to bring the winter caretaking party and take us back to civilisation was twice delayed. Once the ship turned back because of unfavourable weather. On the second attempt she was forced to return to Townsville to await from Sydney a replacement for a damaged boiler plate. Eventually the *Bopple* did





State Library of Queensland  
John Oxley Library

arrive, unloaded her stores, landed the relief crew and set off, with ourselves aboard, for Townsville. Two days later we were again on the mainland enjoying fresh food and the company of other people. We were soon provided with passages in the coastal steamer *Kanowna* for the return voyage to Melbourne and to relations and friends once more. We had been absent for almost nine months. After a short leave period, I once again returned to the Melbourne Coastal Radio Station.

## 1923, Early radio

It was at about this time that experiments were being conducted in the Radio Broadcasting field. One of the first, if not actually the first, set of experiments in this field [was] carried out at the Melbourne Coastal Radio Station. One of the first voices transmitted through a broadcasting system in Australia was my own.

Apparently I had shown some interest in this developing entertainment medium as I was soon chosen as a member of the technical staff to open the broadcasting station then building in Sydney, 2FC. A year later I was returned to Melbourne as one of the technical staff of the new station there, 3LO.

Additional broadcasting station licences were being issued; one was issued to the Queensland Government, whereupon I was offered the opportunity to take charge of the technical work of that station and to take part in its management. Although the offer was quite attractive, it was with some misgivings that I tendered my resignation from those who had employed me for some years, and took up my new duties as Chief Engineer of 4QG in Brisbane.

Broadcasting was then still in its infancy. There were many opportunities to show initiative. In retrospect it seems to me that some of the cornerstones upon which broadcasting rests today were built during the early days of 2FC, 3LO and 4QG.

Call signs of some of the early Australian broadcast-

ing stations are interesting. Firstly, each State, as now, carried an identifying figure – 2, New South Wales; 3, Victoria; 4, Queensland; 5, South Australia; 6, Western Australia; and 7, Tasmania. In the early days of Australian broadcasting the 2-letter suffix of the call signs generally [was] afforded some relationship with the owners of the stations; 2FC came from Farmer Company; 2BL came from Broadcasters Limited; and there were 6WF, Westralian Farmers; 4QG, Queensland Government. 3LO broke adrift from tradition and adopted LO from 2LO London. In later years it became common practice to relate the 2-letter suf-



Brisbane Telegraph 18 April 1925.



Brisbane Daily Mail 26 April 1925.



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

Certificate No. 788

## CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY IN RADIOTELEGRAPHY

POSTMASTER - GENERAL  
GRANTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER.

**FIRST CLASS**

This is to Certify that, under the provisions of the  
International Radiotelegraphic Convention and the *Wireless Telegraphy*  
*Act 1905-1919*, Mr Frederick William Stevens  
has been examined in Radiotelegraphy, and has passed in :—

- (a) The adjustment of apparatus and knowledge of its working.
- (b) Transmission and sound-reading at a speed of not less than 20 words a minute.
- (c) Knowledge of the regulations applicable to the exchange of radio-telegraphic traffic.

The candidate is proficient in the following systems :—

Marconi  
Telefunken

It is also certified hereby that the holder has made a legal  
declaration that he will preserve the secrecy of correspondence.

Signature of Certifying Officer J. Malone  
Controller of Wireless.  
CHIEF MANAGER TELEGRAPHS AND WIRELESS.

Chas. F. Bright Secretary, Prime Minister's Department.  
POSTMASTER - GENERAL'S

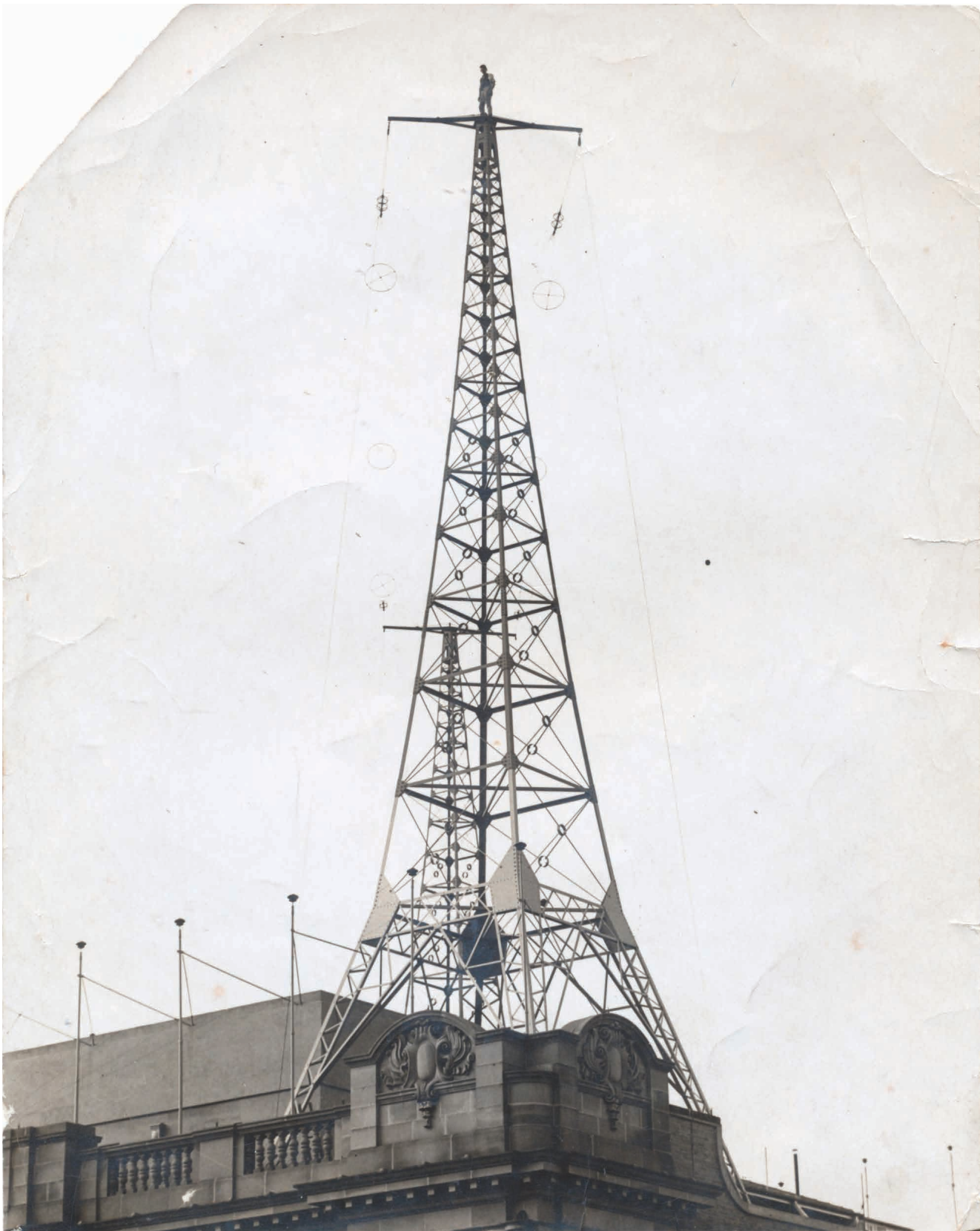
6-9-23. (Date)

Signature of Holder F. W. Stevens

Date of Birth 3-1-98. Place of Birth Camberwell (Vic).

N.B.—This Certificate may be indorsed, or withdrawn, at the discretion of the Minister in case of misconduct or breach of the Regulations on the part of the holder. Unless so withdrawn, it will continue to be valid so long as the Regulations of the Radiotelegraphic Convention concluded in London in 1912 remain in force.

C.12338.



Frederick William Stevens, Chief Engineer, 4QG Brisbane, on top of radio mast (1925ish).

"The blue lights which make the towers of 4QG so conspicuous by night oftentimes require a certain amount of attention. Some few days ago some of the lights burned out and the chief engineer, Mr. F. W. Stevens, climbed to the top of the towers to replace them. He took the old lamps out and while putting in new ones, a globe slipped out of his hand and crashed to the roof of the building 100 feet below. Mr. Stevens descending from the tower head walked across the roof to pick up the pieces. Imagine his surprise when he found the lamp lying quite intact on the concrete roof. It had struck the roof with the base and beyond a slight dint in the metal portion was quite unharmed."





fixes to Places rather than Persons, as, for example, 5HA, Hamilton; 2CO, Corowa; 3GL, Geelong; 4AT, Atherton; 4QR, Queensland Region. Some stations, of course, carry callsigns allotted in sequence without reference to person or place as, for example, 2NZ, Inverell; 4ZR, Roma, etc. [It is worth noting here that Fred's own call sign was 4SP.]

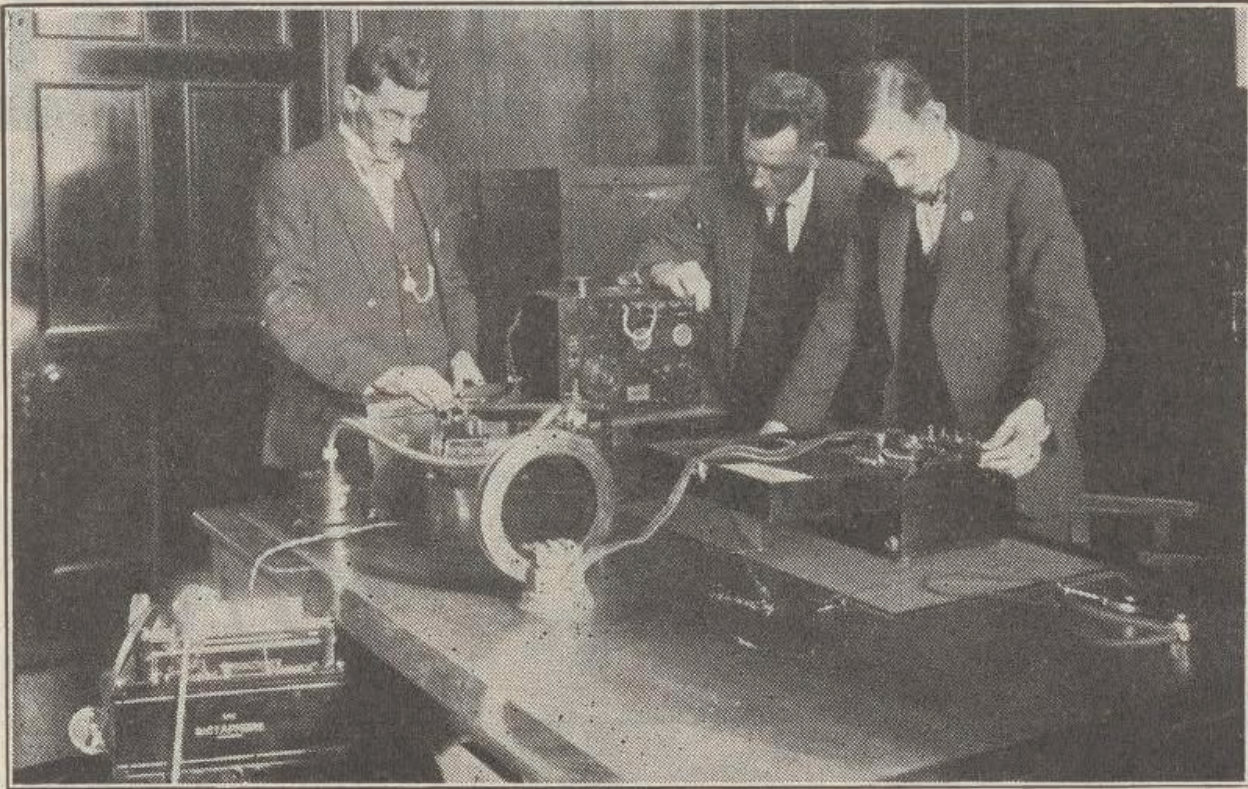
Broadcasting, in those early days, lent itself to novelties that in later years became commonplace. The type of "portable" pickup equipment used in theatres and other places of entertainment and at Shows and the like was not really portable; it was barely transportable. A feature of early broadcasting from 2FC in Sydney was the taking of excerpts and occasionally full acts from the old and now non-existent Her Majesty's Theatre. On the mornings prior to the evenings of such broadcasts it was necessary to hire a lorry, load it with cases of equipment weighing possibly a quarter of a ton, transport the cases to space under Her Majesty's stage, connect up the equipment, run microphone leads to selected locations in the theatre and test the completed job by voice transmissions to the Studio over hired telephone lines. Having done all this, it was necessary to return to the Theatre to position the microphone before patrons arrived and then, if the portion of the program to be broadcast was near the end of the performance, to wait throughout the program with nothing to do but watch the show. I saw such as "The Merry Widow" and others of similar type a dozen or more times each.

"Stunt" broadcasting, as it was then known, was also popular. We broadcast the voice of a diver from the muddy bottom of the Brisbane River; there was the description of Brisbane that was broadcast from the top of the wireless mast of 4QG that, in those days, stood some 250 feet above George Street Brisbane and atop the old State Insurance Building; and there was the re-broadcasting of wireless signals received from the aircraft *Southern Cross* as she winged her way on the first flight across the Pacific Ocean and when on one occasion the signals said "We might be able to make it to Suva but yet doubtful." Church services, musical festivals, eisteddfods and the like, now taken for granted in broadcasting programs, were then real novelties. Their successful broadcast called for quite considerable ingenuity on the part of the technical people involved, much planning, and often long weary hours of waiting.

Associated with early broadcasting days there is also the memory of the "sealed set". Broadcast reception was allowed only from selected stations, and to this end all receivers sold to the public were "sealed" on prescribed radio frequencies. This was a most unpop-







*An interesting experiment was carried out recently at Station 4QG, Brisbane. While the Brisbane Federal Band was playing in the Studio a receiving set was operated in one of the offices and the band music was received by wireless. It was amplified and then, by the use of a Dictaphone, a gramophone record was made. When the band had finished playing, the record was taken into the Studio, played, and then transmitted by wireless. The photograph shows the experiment being conducted. On the table is seen the wavemeter, a portable W.E. Amplifier, and the Dictaphone. Mr. F. W. Stevens (chief engineer, 4QG), is on the left, Mr. Barkess (Dictaphone Co.) in the centre, and Mr. J. W. Robinson (Director, 4QG) on the right.*

*Wireless Weekly 27 August 1926.*

ular innovation and was soon dropped in favour of the type of broadcast receivers now generally in use throughout Australia.

The quality of broadcast transmission and reception has improved throughout the development of this art; portable, mostly "transistor-ised", receivers are in truth portable; VHF and UHF links have to a large extent superseded hired line connections, and record-

ers have provided a means of "bottling" programs for later broadcast. But the "mystery" of broadcasting, the great achievement associated with the broadcast of such as the 3rd Act of "The Merry Widow", is now all taken as a part of life. Pioneers in this as in other fields are forgotten and overshadowed by such as TV and evolution.



## 1929, The *Kookaburra*

One evening as I sat at dinner I received a telephone call from Lester Brain, who was also Brisbane Manager for Qantas. The aircraft *Southern Cross*, flown by [Charles] Kingsford Smith and a crew of three en route from Sydney to London on an experimental mail flight, had disappeared in north-western Western Australia. Seeking these lost fliers, Keith Anderson and Bob Hitchcock as mechanic had themselves disappeared somewhere in central Australia believed to be north-west of Alice Springs. A Qantas aircraft had now been chartered to search for Anderson and Hitchcock. I was asked if I could fit radio equipment to the Qantas aircraft.

Radio in aircraft at that time was very rare; I knew very little about aircraft and nothing about radio in aircraft. I did have, however, a set of equipment with which I experimented at home and which I thought

Brisbane Telegraph 19 April 1929.

### BRISBANE PLANE Take Off at Daylight

Messrs. L. J. Brain, Brisbane manager of Qantas, P. H. Compson (mechanic), and F. W. Stevens (deputy director of Station 4QG, wireless operator), left Brisbane at daylight this morning in the *Atlanta*, a D.H.50 Jupiter engined aeroplane, to take part in the search for the missing airman, Keith Anderson.

Up till a late hour last night officials of station 4QG were busy installing wireless apparatus on the aeroplane.

The dispatch of the *Atlanta* on its mission will seriously inconvenience Qantas on its new Brisbane-Charleville mail service but the company unhesitatingly complied with a request made by the Defence Department to make a machine available.

The aeroplane will fly to Longreach which, it is expected, will be reached about 2.30 p.m. Here an extra petrol tank will be installed and the aeroplane will then set out for Wave Hill, which will be the base of operations.

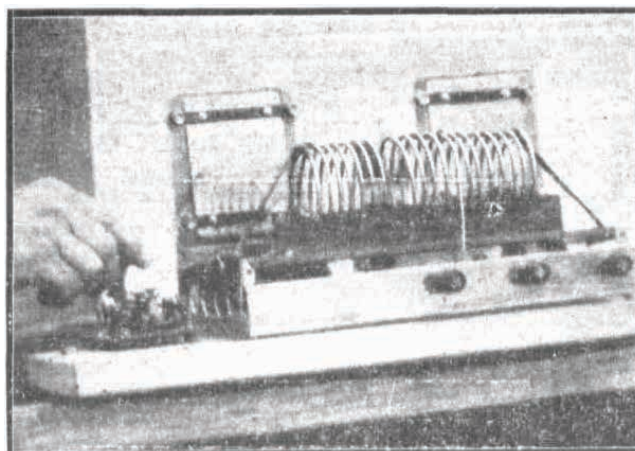
The aeroplane will be in constant touch with 4QG.



*Atlanta* at Wave Hill 17 April 1929.

might serve a reasonable purpose. With some assistance I dismantled my rig at home, transported it to Eagle Farm and began the task of installing it in the chartered aircraft in such a manner that, as far as I could estimate – or more correctly “guesstimate” – would not interfere with the working of the aircraft itself, would allow space for an operator, the flight engineer and necessary emergency rations, spare tyre, extra fuel tank and a small amount of luggage, but at the same time be in a reasonably workable position. It was with real satisfaction, about 2 am next morning after awakening a friend at his home, to get a report from him that he could hear my test signals. It was not until now that any real thought, excepting by Brain, had been given to the identity of the operator that should accompany the expedition. When this was mentioned to Brain he seemed to have already concluded that I should be his wireless operator. Within a space of four hours I had been home and made my plans known, selected a few items of clothing that I might need and essential other small items, and a small camera, returned to the aerodrome and was airborne for parts, to me, unknown.

The radio set adapted by Fred to be carried in the *Atlanta*. Brisbane Telegraph 1 May 1929.







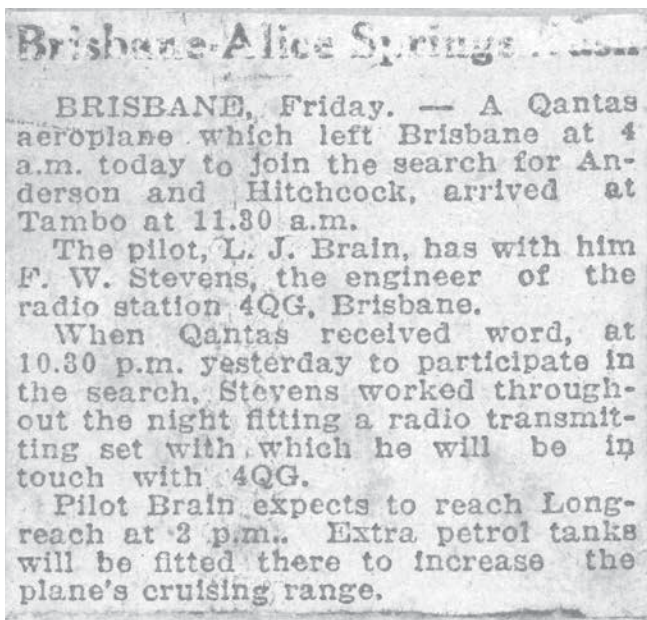
"Position, approximate centre of triangle joining Wave Hill, Powell Creek and Newcastle Waters N.T. Loss of Anderson & Hitchcock in 'Kookaburra', forced down by engine failure during search for Kingsford Smith in 'Southern Cross'. Shewing [sic] Hitchcock's body under the wing. Anderson's body was later found in scrub at bottom right of picture. Shewing [sic] also shadow of search aircraft 'Atalanta' flown by Brain & Stevens. Taken 18/4/1929"



'Shewing [sic] the "Kookaburra" at the edge of the burnt area which resulted from a fire started by the crew to attract attention. Shewing also, somewhat vaguely, the "runway" the crew endeavored to clear with their hands. Taken 18/4/1929'







We landed at Tambo in south-western Queensland to refuel. It was here that, with great disappointment, I received a telegram from Brisbane announcing that soon after leaving Brisbane my signals had not been received. I checked my gear, which was of very rudimentary design, and was elated when I discovered that a wire had broken adrift, possibly by aircraft vibration, and this had put the set completely out of action but which, because of the lack of suitable instruments in the transmitter, could not be detected during flight. Having repaired the small but vital damage to the transmitter we set out for Longreach, and upon arrival there I was advised that my signals were now being received quite satisfactorily. We night-stopped at Longreach and again the following night at the Brunette Downs homestead in the Northern Territory. On the morning of the third day out of Brisbane we moved from Brunette Downs and arrived at Newcastle Waters in time for a goat and damper breakfast. It was our intention then to proceed to Wave Hill, establish a base, and commence our search; Brain had a sound "hunch" that the missing aircraft would be within reasonable flying distance from Wave Hill.

As we now proceeded in what would later be known as the "probability area" we each kept an intensive lookout. In the type of aircraft used by us, a DH50, passengers were seated in a small canopy-covered cabin while the pilot occupied a conventional outside seat and with visibility much better than was possible in the cabin. It was not unexpected, therefore, that when we reached a point some 50 miles on track towards Wave Hill, Brain passed through a written note announcing that he had sighted smoke away to the south of [our] track and that he was altering course to investigate. This information was immediately set out by wireless.



Lester Brain signs autographs at Camooweal aerodrome 18 April 1929.

Approaching the smoke it could be seen that a patch of scrub and grass was blackened over an area of some 200 square miles on one edge of which, reflecting the sun, was an object that at our distance resembled a jam tin, but which as we came nearer took on the shape and size of a small aeroplane. The missing aeroplane *Kookaburra*, registration letters G-AUKA, had been found. There was a body under a wing; no other person or body could be found in our search from the air. I passed this information to the wireless station at Wave Hill that had set up a special watch for me and soon we were proceeding there. A land party set out next day and found that tragedy had overcome the fliers; both had died of thirst after a forced landing due to engine trouble.

After a rest for a day we retraced our steps but called at Sydney en route where some photographs that I had taken while over the wreck were published, with some compensation to me, in a Sydney newspaper. My experience of aeroplanes was building up.

Brisbane Courier 27 April 1929.



Left to right.—Mechanic P. H. Compston, Pilot L. J. Brain, and Mr. F. W. Stevens (Deputy Director of 4QG), who formed the crew of the aeroplane *Atalanta* during its successful search for the missing aeroplane *Kookaburra*.



Brisbane Telegraph 22 April 1929.

# FATE OF AIRMEN

## Intensive Search in Northern Territory

### RESCUE PARTY HURRYING TO STRANDED 'PLANE

All the available search planes are concentrating to-day on the area surrounding the stranded Kookaburra in the hope of finding the missing member of her crew. Meanwhile horsemen and black trackers are hurrying across the 60 miles of country between Wave Hill and the scene of the disaster.

The plan was for the planes to assemble at Newcastle Waters, the pilots having been instructed to divide the country into sections and to scour each of them thoroughly. Information that she was about to leave on the search was sent from that centre by the Qantas machine Atalanta, at 8.45 o'clock this morning.

#### OVERHAULING WIRELESS.

It was then the intention of the pilot (Mr. L. J. Brain) to fly to Wave Hill, where the wireless set was to be overhauled. This message was sent to the Queensland Radio Station by its Deputy Director (Mr. F. W. Stevens), who is the wireless operator on the Atalanta. The overhaul evidently was necessitated by the vibrations, Mr. Stevens stating that these were "terrific."

The next message received by 4QG was dispatched at 11.15 o'clock. The Atalanta had then been searching for "just an hour." Its future plans were summarised thus: "Proceeding to Powell's Creek, thence due east."

#### STORY OF FINDING.

Within five minutes of its reception the news that the Atalanta had found the Kookaburra was broadcasted by Station 4QG.

The message was lodged at Wave Hill at 2.30 o'clock yesterday afternoon, but it was not until 10 minutes past 8 o'clock last night that it reached Brisbane. Five minutes later it had gone over the air to the thousands of listeners-in.

Brisbane Telegraph 24 April 1929.

## The Atalanta

### FLIGHT TOWARDS HOME

The Atalanta is making good progress on her flight to Brisbane.

At lunch time she was at Camooweal, from where the radio operator (Mr. F. W. Stevens) sent the following message to the Director of the Queensland Radio Service (Mr. J. W. Robinson):—

"Good run this morning. Left Newcastle Waters at 7.40. Stopped at Brunette Downs for morning tea. Having lunch here and refilling. Will probably make Longreach to-night, or, if light fails, will stop at Winton."



### Extract from *Qantas Rising* by Sir Hudson Fysh

The year 1929 was packed with aviation history and drama. About the time of the opening of our Brisbane–Charleville service came the Kookaburra and Vickers Vellore searches by L.J. Brain in our Longreach-built Bristol-Jupiter-engined DH50J Atalanta – both successful searches which made history for Brain and his aeroplane.

Kingsford Smith and Ulm, after their successful crossing of the Pacific Ocean, went on to be the first to fly from Australia to New Zealand, and to create other Australian records. They then began to organize a company to begin regular air-route operations in Australia, having mainly in mind linking up the eastern capital cities, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

On 31st March 1929, with Litchfield and McWilliams, they set off from Sydney in the Southern Cross for England, where they were negotiating for the purchase of Avro X aircraft for the new service. Their first objective was Wyndham in north-west Australia.

When they were nearing their objective very bad visibility was experienced and with a defective radio they were forced to land on a mud-flat. To the rest of the world they simply disappeared into the blue.

Woods of West Australian Airways, who was nearest the locality, made extensive searches, but it was not till twelve days after the landing that Les Holden flying a DH61 aeroplane discovered them and they were rescued.

Meanwhile K. Anderson and H.S. Hitchcock in a small and totally unsuitable Westland III aircraft named Kookaburra had set out to search for the Southern Cross and they, in turn, were reported missing over bad desert country in the far interior.

On 19th April, when they had been missing for nine days, we received an urgent request from the citizens' search commit-

tee in Sydney to set out. It was then that the Defence Department came into the picture and asked us to join the new search, switched from the now-discovered Southern Cross.

The Defence Department sent out three Air Force machines and on 19th April L.J. Brain in charge of the DH50J Atalanta set out from Brisbane with Engineer Compston and Radio Officer F.W. Stevens, properly equipped for survival in the desert should the necessity arise. Brain was an old hand at flying over the far interior.

On 21st April, towards the end of a rapid dash from Brisbane, they were nearing their objective of Wave Hill, which had been set up as a search depot, when Brain saw smoke going up from a burning bush area away to the south. When wisely they investigated, there sure enough was the Kookaburra, intact but on ground too rough to land the Atalanta. The position was 80 miles south-east of Wave Hill.

Flying low almost at ground-level, they saw a body lying under the wing of the Kookaburra, but there was no sign of the other member of the crew.

A land expedition was then organized, in which Flight Lieutenant Eaton of the RAAF went out with others and located the Kookaburra. The body of Hitchcock was recovered under the wing, and that of Anderson about 40 yards away.

A rough diary had been scribbled on the wing, but little was known of the last tragic days of the two flyers marooned without proper supplies and water. Even the alcohol in their compass had been drunk.

The Daily Guardian brought Atalanta and Brain to Sydney, and paid well for the story and photographs. (Note: I understand the photographs were taken with a small box camera Fred took with him, and I remember Fred telling me they locked them in a Hotel Room at Bondi to stop them giving the story to another paper.)

[Quoted by kind permission of the Qantas Founders Museum]

# FINDING OF KOOKABURRA

## Story of Pilot of the Atalanta

### "DISTURBED EARTH NOT A GRAVE"

LONGREACH, April 25.

On her homeward flight the Atalanta reached Longreach late yesterday afternoon. "The realisation of the tragedy took away all the joy of the discovery," said her pilot (Mr. L. J. Brain) when recounting how, as the plane winged low over the Central Australian desert, he solved the mystery of the tragic fate of the Kookaburra.

When the stranded machine was first sighted, said Mr. Brain, he was naturally pleased and excited. Then came moments of tense anxiety as to the fate of the crew.

#### PLEASURE SHORT-LIVED.

But the pleasure was short-lived. "for," he said, "I circled low and saw Anderson's body lying dead under the wing. By flying just above the tree tops I satisfied myself that he had been dead for some days. The realisation of the tragedy took away all the joy of the discovery. Obviously the signal fires lighted by Anderson set fire to the spinifex and undergrowth, which was still smoking some 20 miles away. We searched around for the best part of an hour in the vain hope of finding Hitchcock alive, and then, in view of the fact that we were taking very grave risks flying low around that sort of country, we decided that it was desirable to proceed to Wave Hill and make sure that our wireless signals had been received, and to confirm our report."

On Tuesday the Atalanta for the fourth time visited the scene of the disaster, her occupants concentrating their attention on the disturbed ground near the Kookaburra. Mr. Brain says that he satisfied himself that this was a hole dug in the ground for obtaining water, and not for the purposes of burial, although it is still possible that the body of Mr. Hitchcock might be covered by a bit of brush near the machine.

#### OFFERS TO MAKE DESCENT.

Mr. Brain stated that the exact locality of Anderson's machine, which had been checked and rechecked by him on each occasion visited, was 195 miles west by north from Powell's Creek, and 80 miles east by south-east from the

Wave Hill homestead, which was the nearest habitation. It was all desert country.

Squadron-Leader Kingsford Smith had told him how greatly his party felt the tragedy, particularly as Anderson had lost his life in an endeavour to find the Southern Cross. Squadron-Leader Kingsford Smith had expressed his willingness to jump in a parachute over the locality. The whole of the Air Force party had also expressed their anxiousness to jump over in parachutes, but were dissuaded by Mr. Brain, as he considered that it was not reasonable to risk more lives without some definite prospect of achievement.

Mr. Brain paid a warm tribute to Mr. F. W. Stevens (Deputy Director of the Queensland Radio Service), who is the wireless operator on the Atalanta, expressing great admiration for the tireless work by Mr. Stevens in maintaining the radio equipment and assisting the mechanic, Mr. P. H. Compston, working half the night in refuelling and maintaining the engine. "He was a wonder," said Mr. Brain.

Mr. Brain regards the trip as a triumph for aviation and radio in Australia.

#### ARRIVAL OF CANBERRA.

Captain Matheson, of the Goulburn Aero Club, who was on his way to join in the search for the Kookaburra, and was held up in Duchess owing to engine trouble, also arrived in Longreach yesterday. Captain Matheson's machine, when reaching Duchess on his way to Wave Hill, suffered broken piston rings, caused by badly-fitted cylinders. He was ready to leave Duchess for Wave Hill on Monday, when the news came through that the Kookaburra had been located.

Brisbane Telegraph 25 April 1929.



## 1930, Early aviation

It was during my period of service at 4QG that I generated an interest in flying, which was then in its growing infancy in Australia. I took a trial flight in a training aircraft at what was then a “pocket handkerchief” and little more than a “cow-paddock” aerodrome at Eagle Farm, Brisbane. The Instructor of the Brisbane Flying School was the late Charles (C. W. A.) Scott who, with the late [Tom] Campbell Black, later won the London to Melbourne Centenary Air Race. The manager was Lester Brain, who later, among many other things, became the first General Manager of Trans Australia Airlines [TAA]. It was Brain who first introduced me to the art of flying. I found the experience most exhilarating, particularly when the aircraft was put into steep turns. I shall probably long remember my first flight when I looked down upon the winding Brisbane River, the steamers at the wharves, a dredge at work and the matchbox houses.

I signed up for Private Pilot training and, within a few days, commenced my training with Charles Scott. One of the first details passed to me by Scott was that, should the aircraft engine stop, I was to “Push the stick forward.” Soon after taking off and gaining some height, Scott, without advising me, pulled the throttle back and, of course, slowed down the engine to the extent that I imagined it was stopping. Without hesitation, and recalling the instructions given to me to “Push the stick forward,” I did just that. If I had been told to “Ease the stick forward,” all would have been well. As it was I took the instruction literally, with the result that both Scott and myself were almost thrown out of the aircraft, at least to the full extent of our safety belt, and we almost went into an outside loop. I think Scott learned something from this experience; certainly I did.

In due course I passed my tests and examinations as prescribed and became the proud possessor of a Private Pilot’s (then known as an “A”) licence. Later still I was authorised to carry a passenger.

This milestone in my life was celebrated by joining a flying picnic party of three aircraft, each with a passenger, in a DH60 to Yellow Patch on Moreton Island, a few miles from Brisbane. All proceeded to plan until we were airborne on the way home. As soon as we gained sufficient height to see the distance towards our home port it was obvious that there was heavy rain ahead. Our three aircraft were supposed to return to Brisbane in formation, but this proved impossible. We soon ran into heavy rain and some turbulence and saw, not far away, flashes of lightning. By standards later



Above: Fred with VH-ULR, which he first flew in August 1934.

Below: The aircraft in which Fred took his first solo flight in 1930.



learned I was ill-equipped to handle the situation that had so unexpectedly developed. I had sense enough, however, to realise that if I were to become a commercial pilot, and in any event as there was nobody to whom I could turn for advice, I had to get out of the situation by my own efforts. I realised in time to benefit from the realisation that the storm was relatively localised and that, a few miles off track, there was a thinning of the storm. I turned towards what appeared to me to be a better flying area and as it proved to be, and came in to land behind the main part of the storm

parking area to find that the other two aircraft had already landed, although one had been damaged in doing so. I learned from that experience too.



## 1934, Qantas Empire Airways

In December 1934, Fred commenced work as a Qantas First Officer.

From 7 January 1934 through to 24 July 1937, Fred flew as Senior First Officer and Wireless Operator Mechanic on the Brisbane to Singapore route in the five DH86s employed on that route. These were:

- VH-USC, RMA Canberra, C of A (Certificate of Airworthiness) issued 13/9/34, flown by Captain Brain from Croydon, UK
- VH-USD, RMA Brisbane, C of A issued 24/9/34
- VH-USE, RMA Sydney, C of A issued 2/10/34; crashed near Brisbane 2/2/34 (Captain Swaffield)
- VH-USF, RMA Melbourne, C of A issued 27/12/34
- VH-UUA, RMA Adelaide, C of A issued 14/2/35.

A total of 64 DH86s were built, the last to fly being G-ACZP, which became damaged beyond repair at Madrid on 21 September 1958.

Between them, the five Qantas DH86s on the Brisbane to Singapore route flew 2½ million miles, and completed every one of their 525 scheduled flights, with 90% of their terminal arrivals being within 60 minutes of timetable. Unquestionably a fine record of achievement by all concerned.

Fred's son George collected more details of these aircraft, as well as:

- first official westbound QEA air mail service, 22/2/1935
- first official eastbound QEA air mail service, 26/2/1935
- first British aircraft to land at Bali, 20/5/1935
- a true story of innovative direction finding of a lost DH86 aircraft; Hudson Fysh relates this story in brief on pages 26 and 27 of his book *Qantas at War*
- notable passengers carried – Charlie Chaplin and Pauline Goddard.

My time with QEA undoubtedly stands out in my mind as the most rewarding period in 50 years' employment in various capacities. There was discipline, and rightly so, but there was ample opportunity for and encouragement of independent thought. Suggestions with regard not only to my primary job as senior Radio Officer but [also] to flying and navigation too were always given full consideration and, in several instances, adopted. As you know, I was never given command of a DH86 in the strict sense of the word. I have it on record, however, that Lester Brain considered me to be a very good pilot and on several occasions I did for all practical purposes take over the captain's job for a trip to or from Singapore. Lester Brain and Bert Hussey were the two captains who had most faith in me as a pilot although, strange as it might seem, Ron Adair was often glad to seek my opinion when things got a bit sticky. Ron was probably a good pilot but he was a careless navigator, and once or twice I managed to pull him out of a hole. The real test of pulling a captain out

of a hole, however, came on the occasion of the "lost and found" episode at Darwin .... Bert Hussey was the captain on that occasion and, although Bert never mentioned the episode to me once we had landed at Darwin, I'm ego[ti]stical enough to believe that it was my knowledge of the vagaries of radio and the exercise of some common sense at that stage that saved us from a forced landing somewhere "out in the Mulga south of Darwin".



## 1935, First Australian air mail service, Darwin–Singapore

[Lester Brain and Fred flew the first passenger and official air mail service from Brisbane to Singapore in a DH86, to link up with the Imperial Airways service London to Singapore. On 22 February 1935 they departed Darwin for Singapore, with Sir Edward Campbell as passenger. Then on 26 February, they made the first eastbound trip Singapore to Darwin. The journey from Brisbane to Singapore took 7 days with stops at Toowoomba, Roma, Charleville, Blackall, Longreach, Winton, Cloncurry, Mt Isa, Camooweal, Brunette Downs, Newcastle Waters, Daly Waters, Darwin, Koepang, Rambang, Surabaya, Batavia, and Singapore. Once the service was established, the trip took 1 week; then they rested in Singapore for another week; then the return took 1 week: all up, 3 weeks to fly from Brisbane to Singapore and back.]

The date of my departure on this particular occasion was Christmas Day, 25 December 1934. It was a survey flight to Singapore in preparation for the first official airmail service linking Australia with England but connecting with Imperial Airways, forerunner of BOAC, which organisation already linked Singapore to the old country.

The planned route for the Australian-operated link was Brisbane – Roma – Charleville – Blackall – Longreach – Winton – Cloncurry – Mt Isa – Camooweal – Brunette Downs – Newcastle Waters (dropping mail at Anthonys Lagoon and Alexandria) – Daly Waters – Darwin – Koepang (Timor) – Rambang (Lombok Island) – Soerabaya – Batavia (now Djakarta) – Singapore. In addition, occasional stops were made at Waingapoo (Soemba Island) and/or Palembang (Sumatra) for fuel. Overnight stops were made westbound at Cloncurry, Darwin and Soerabaya, while eastbound night stops were made at Rambang, Darwin and Longreach. Those were working men's flights with working men's wages (4/- per hour flying pay) – four full days flying each way sometimes up to 14 hours on the job with another full day's flying to follow. There was no "George", no Hosties, no meals in the air; do most of your own refuelling and much of the routine maintenance; count the bags and weigh them and load your own mail working out by rule of thumb your own weight and balance; issue passenger tickets at the smaller stopping places; pump up a tyre in 112° [44.4 °C] in the shade at Daly Waters and, by Company rules, be pleasant, shaved and neatly dressed at all times.

The Service started with a listening watch each 30 minutes by the Coastal Radio Station (VIB) Brisbane

## FIRST MAIL PLANE

### Diana Leaving on Monday

### Second Machine to Go Too

The well known Qantas plane Diana has been chosen by Qantas Empire Airways to inaugurate the Australian-England air mail service, leaving Brisbane next Monday morning and, as was to be expected, Captain L. J. Brain, chief pilot of the company, will have the honour of piloting the plane.

The Duke of Gloucester will dispatch the mail at 9.45 a.m. on Monday and it is expected that the Prime Minister (Mr. J. A. Lyons), and other Federal Ministers will attend to witness the historic event.

With the Diana, Qantas also intends to send the Hippomenes. This will be in charge of another well known pilot, Captain G. U. ("Scotty") Allen.

The indications are that the Hippomenes also will carry mail.

At Darwin the mails will be transferred to a large plane of the Atlanta type which Imperial Airways are sending from Singapore. This plane will take the mails to Karachi, from which

centre they will be carried to Cairo by a big Handley Page machine of the Hannibal type. At Cairo there is another transfer. This time to a machine of the Scipio seaplane type, which will take the mails to Brindisi, whence they travel overland by rail to Paris, where they are again transferred to a plane to be carried to England.

The second overseas mail from Australia will leave Brisbane on December 18 by the Apollo, which will be piloted by Captain R. B. Tapp, one of the best known of the Qantas pilots, who now has over 4,000 flying hours to his credit.



L. J. BRAIN

who now has over 4,000 flying hours to his credit.

The first mail from England to Australia is due to arrive at Darwin on December 17 by an Imperial Airways plane and it probably will be brought on to Brisbane by the Diana, arriving here on December 21.

#### STAFF ADDITIONS.

It is learned that Captain H. B. Hussey has joined Qantas Empire Airways. He has a very extensive flying experience with the Larkin Aircraft Company in the South and with the H. C. Miller Company of Adelaide. He has a good knowledge of the route from Brisbane to Darwin, having flown for some years between Camooweal and Daly Waters on the regular mail services.

The fifth pilot is Captain P. G. Taylor, who recently accompanied Sir Charles Kingsford Smith across the Pacific, and who subsequently went to England to bring out one of the machines which are to be used on the Australia-England service.

Five first officers also have been appointed, one of their qualifications being that they are skilled radio operators. One of these officers is Mr. F. W. Stevens, late chief engineer at Station 4QG, and more recently chief engineer of Station 4BC.

It will be recalled that Mr. Stevens accompanied Captain L. J. Brain in the Atlanta some years ago on a flight into

Central Australia in search of the ill-fated aviators Anderson and Hitchcock. The wireless apparatus which was operated by Mr. Stevens during the flight, was built by him the night previous to the day on which the Atlanta set off on her search. Mr. Stevens should be a valuable acquisition to Qantas Empire Airways, because of his very thorough knowledge of wireless equipment, its installation, and its operation, for as an experienced telegraphist he had extensive experience before embarking on the broadcasting side. He was one of the original operators at the Willis Island station, which was established for the purpose of transmitting meteorological information to Australia.

Fred (right) in Singapore in 1936 at the Raffles Hotel, where Qantas crews used to stay.







Fred (far left) in the Qantas staff canteen in Newcastle Waters, around 1935.

and (VID) Darwin. We transmitted on something about 6540 kcs [kilocycles = kHz] but as the transmitters were not crystal controlled the frequency varied considerably from trip to trip and somewhat from "sked" to "sked". We always kept very strict skeds (18 and 48 minutes past the hour) and sent a long string of Vs for tuning before transmitting QTH ["What is your position?"]. Between Brisbane and Roma and between Birdum and Darwin it was possible to work two-way receiving 333 kcs. Between Roma and Birdum we sent QTH on sked but did not receive any acknowledgment. Westward of Darwin by this time a small station had been established at Koepang. Between Koepang and Rambang we sometimes worked Koepang or, with some luck, the Coastal Radio Station Darwin or Broome (VIO). Until we made contact with Palembang some 900 miles further along the route we fought with ships at sea on 500 kcs for some attention from the Coastal Radio Stations at Soerabaya and Batavia. The best method of attack there was to call madly, sometimes with an "Urgency" signal thrown in for good measure, just before the silence period ended at 18 or 48 minutes past the hour. Palembang and Singapore were essentially aeronautical stations and could generally be depended upon to be on watch and to find our spot on the dial. These stations also had BT DF [Bellini-Tosi direction finder], which provided some amusement but little help. Reciprocal bearings were not unknown.

Out of the initial survey flight came some developments. After a year or so the first aeronautical station at Brisbane came into being; Darwin likewise was given somewhat improved facilities including BT DF. One of the first developments, however, arose from discussions with the PMG's Department. About this time, Harold Stiff was Radio Postmaster at Camooweal.

The bookkeeper and wireless operator at Brunette Downs, around 1935.





Harold had a MF transmitter and a receiver which he used to handle telegrams between Camooweal and Wave Hill, Brunette Downs, etc. These facilities were made available to give service to the “giant airliner” (a DH86). Harold not only manned one of the earliest “aeradio” stations in Australia; he provided at Camooweal one of the first Aerodrome Information Services and what was, I believe, the first approach to an “Advisory” Service. I have one vivid recollection of “finding” Camooweal in IFR [instrument flight rules] and what would now be below-minimal conditions – heavy rain and clouds down on the fence posts – only with the help of Harold’s Information and “Advisory” services .... Camooweal was our breakfast stop when westbound. After departing Mt Isa I had but to give an ETA to Harold and sign off “FWS” to be assured that sausages and eggs were selected from the menu and ready on the table when we landed.

There came a day, 3 July 1938 to be precise, when the first Dutch (KLM) service to enter Australia was due to arrive [in] Cloncurry en route to Brisbane. Cloncurry did not possess COM facilities. On 1 July 1938, equipment and three men were loaded into a small aircraft (DH90) and flown to Cloncurry, arriving about 1500 local. On 3 July 1938, two days later, at 1600 local, two-way communication plus BT DF was available for service, and within a few minutes contact was established with the KLM aircraft and DF bearings [were] passed.

The second KLM service proved the value of the new station. This aircraft departed Cloncurry about 0600 local for Brisbane. At about 0900 local the aircraft struggled back to Cloncurry on DF [direction finder] bearings while the pilot, upon landing, assured us that “It is all sand there.” He had, apparently, been on a track for Adelaide rather than Brisbane and had seen for the first time the Simpson Desert.

### 1935, First British aircraft to land at Bali

20 May 1935, Aircraft VH-USC. Crew L. J. Brain in command, F. W. Stevens First Officer, passengers nil. We made an exploratory landing at Bali to test it for possible use in an emergency or for emergency refuelling. The approaches were not attractive and I doubt that a QEA aircraft ever landed there again. However, on 20 December 1935, Bert Hussey in VH-USE made an inspection of Bali from the air. Other captains might also have done so but on this point I have no data.



KLM DC-2 aircraft PH-AKL in about 1935, possibly in Singapore. This aircraft famously crashed on 9 December 1936 in London, killing 15 of the 17 people onboard.

### 1935, Lost and found (or should it be “self-help”?)

This is a story of happenings on 26 and 27 August 1935. There is nothing heroic in the story. It aims only to show that, as so often was necessary in the earlier days of flying, a little thought and the application of some common sense often got a pilot out of a tight corner. It could be argued as the story unfolds that we allowed ourselves to be caught. However, looking back thirty years and more, and remembering that there were no worthwhile radio navigational aids and precious little in the way of reliable ground communication facilities at that stage of overseas aeronautical development, the carefully calculated risk that was taken was justified.

We had departed Singapore, as was usual, before sun-up. As also was usual at that time of day the sky was overcast but turbulence was not severe. Over Muntok, about half way through the first leg of the run and by which time we were out into sunshine, a “noise” developed in one of the port engines; the few engine instruments carried in the DH86 gave no indication that anything was amiss. The “noise” increased in intensity and a slight vibration could be felt. By throttling back each of the port motors in turn it was quickly evident that the trouble lay in the port inner.

We carried on with three motors but it soon became apparent that there was some quite serious trouble somewhere as, even with the engine now throttled back, the “noise” and vibration were noticeable. By now we were well past PNR [point of no return] in addition to which our only likely alternat[iv]e, Palembang, was closed due [to] fog; there was nothing left to do but press on to Batavia (now Djakarta).

In due course we landed at Batavia. Either a cylinder



head gasket had blown and allowed cylinder head nuts to work loose or nuts having worked loose allowed the gasket to blow. Whatever was the base cause of our trouble does not now matter; what matters is that, as that engine turned, the defective cylinder head was bouncing about one inch and why the whole outfit did not fall apart is not for me to guess. Two cylinder head nuts were found in the cowling while the remaining nuts were holding by one or two threads.

Whether this was a "routine maintenance" job I'm not sure. However, we did much of our own routine maintenance in those days, and as the nearest Engineer was some 600 miles away we set to work, and, believe it or not, the engine ran like a sewing machine when we finished about 1600 local and too late to go on to Soerabaya that evening. That was the cause of the lost and found story that now follows.

Next morning we departed at 0400 and after a very pleasant run arrived at Soerabaya soon after daylight. We refuelled, collected a few sandwiches and were away again in 19 minutes. En route to Rambang we decided that if we could get a favourable forecast for the Koepang–Darwin leg and could be reasonably assured of making an Australian landfall before last light, we would proceed to Darwin that evening. We, therefore, made a special effort to effect a quick turnaround at Rambang and this we achieved in 20 minutes.

As soon as we were clear of the land after departure [from] Rambang we put in a request to Darwin for the desired forecast; in due course it was received and was favourable. Having studied sunset times and having assured ourselves that there was a reasonable margin of safety (assuming that the forecast was reasonably accurate) we decided that, if we would get away from Koepang within 20 minutes of landing, we would carry on and this we did.

Our "sick" motor purred; the weather was fair to good although there was high overcast and the wind on the water was stronger than expected. We took a quick double-drift sight and increased our drift allowance from 5° to 8° port. If that 8° had been 18° we might not have run into trouble.

The sun set behind us; darkness settled over us; a haze merged sea and sky into a grey blanket ahead. Australia seemed to have disappeared.

There was no doubt that we were lost and if we were to get ourselves out of the unusual situation we must do something to help ourselves; this is what was done.

Darwin was asked to send Vs and to continue to send Vs until told otherwise or his Fordson engine that

drove his generator packed up. On a blank piece of paper we made a mark – Point "X". From Point "X" we set out on a track of 270° while the aircraft aerial was disconnected, the receiver very carefully tuned to VID and the gain cut back until signals were barely audible.

In due course signals began to weaken. We allowed this to continue for a while to be sure it was not due to fading. We then turned on to a track of 90° and headed back towards point "X". Signals slowly came up. With one eye on the clock and another on the fuel gauges we carried on in an easterly direction until signals again began to drop off. Once more we turned and headed back towards Point "X" keeping a very careful note of signal strength.

Having arrived back somewhere in the vicinity of Point "X" (we hoped) it was concluded that the maximum signal strength was obtained some 10 minutes' flying time to the westward of this point so we proceeded there. The decision must now be taken whether to turn north or south and although we would have been over Bathurst or Melville Islands it seemed reasonably certain that we were over the mainland; we therefore roughly calculated drift from the scrub fires and set out on a course designed to take us in the direction of Darwin. Minutes passed; more minutes passed as one fuel gauge looked very sick, but believe it or not signals began to increase in strength. A few more minutes and then, suddenly, both of us saw the Darwin rotating light only a few miles dead ahead but bent at almost right angles under the smoke haze.

We landed a few minutes after 2100 some 2 hours after ETA and it was only then that we realised that, apart from the few sandwiches taken aboard at Soerabaya some 12 hours earlier, we had not eaten since the previous evening.

The mail went south next morning dead on time.

### **1936, Charlie Chaplin and Paulette Goddard as passengers**

23 March 1936, aircraft VH-USE, Crew R. Tapp in command, F. W. Stevens First Officer.

Carried as passengers from Singapore to Batavia (Jakarta) the film personalities Charlie Chaplin and Paulette Goddard. The feature of this note is that, although we had a particularly "dirty" trip mostly in heavy and turbulent rain and the first hour in darkness, both these passengers thanked us for a pleasant trip and assured us they would travel again with QEA. They were both very pleasant and friendly passengers.



## 1936, A news scoop

23 April 1936, aircraft VH-USD, crew L.J. Brain in command, F. W. Stevens First Officer. Passengers two newspaper reporters.

A[n] RAAF Dragon Rapide had force-landed somewhere south of Darwin, believed to be in the general vicinity of Newcastle Waters. The RAAF knew the location of the aircraft but they would not give information on the location to the Press. A Sydney newspaper decided to find out for itself something about the crash landing. Brain and I, with VH-USD, were the standby in Darwin for the eastbound flight from Singapore next day. The newspaper chartered the aircraft. We left Darwin on 23 April 1936 with two newspaper reporters aboard soon after daylight. We went straight to Newcastle Waters hoping to get a clue on the location of the crashed Rapide but the RAAF had put a tight measure of security around the whole thing. However, the “bush telegraph” had reached a drover with a mob of cattle near the aerodrome and we soon found out from him that the Rapide was in scrub not far from Newcastle Waters along the Murranji Track. We got back into the air as soon as we had refuelled and soon were flying over the Rapide. The midday turbulence low down was quite severe and soon the newspaper reporters were violently ill. However, they prepared between them in serial form a story which they handed to me. As each section of the story was handed up, I transmitted it by wireless to Darwin for onward transmission by landline to Sydney. I never did see the complete article in newspaper form but it has always been my understanding that the story that I transmitted from VH-USD over the Murranji Track appeared in a Sydney newspaper that same evening before we returned to Darwin.

(It could be interesting in retrospect to find out QEA were paid for the Press messages sent by wireless from their aircraft on this occasion. I am by no means sure of the identity of the newspaper concerned but I have a vague idea that [it] was the *Sun*. I'd recognise the name of one of the reporters if I were to hear it but I cannot at this stage remember it .... Upon further reflection I suspect that the name of the reporter was Waterman.)

## A little humour

After I had been on DH86s for a year or so, L.J. [Brain] one day asked if I was endorsed for the Fox Moth as a taxi job was available. Upon advising L.J. that I was not so endorsed he told me to be at Archerfield next morning when he would give me two or three landings in a DH60 with a view to taking up the Fox. In due

course L.J. and I took our seats in the DH60 (VH-UGW) and I was instructed to take off, which I did. L.J. had very little to say, so I flew around for a while until he said I was to go back and land, which I did. Still L.J. had very little to say, and I began to wonder whether I had completely blotted my copy book. However, he did tell me to taxi in, which I did, and stopped the motor. It was not until then that L.J. told me he did not have a “stick” in the front seat – he had been my unwilling passenger completely at my mercy. Anyway, all was well. I was sent off to do a couple more solo landings in VH-UGW and then presented with the Fox (VH-UZC) for more (successful) landings.

Once, when flying with Bill Crowther, we had been delayed at Longreach westbound due to aerodrome flooding. After waiting for the runways to appear above the water we got off but got only as far as Daly Waters and without sufficient daylight to go on to Darwin. Next day we made Koepang and the day after that made Batavia. By now we were two days behind schedule so decided to make a very early start from Batavia next morning. The weather to the north was overcast with little flickers of lightning on track. After about half an hour in the air, still in complete darkness, we ran into torrential rain and quite severe lightning together with considerable turbulence. With no forecast for the weather ahead and completely unaware of the distance to be flown before we would run out of the stinking weather, we decided to go back to Batavia. Bill called to me for a course to steer, which I put on the compass, and Bill started to edge the aircraft round on to the new heading. We had been flying on the new heading for, perhaps, 3 or 4 minutes when it dawned upon me that the thunderstorm which should now be behind us was in fact on, or nearly on, our beam. The storm just could not have moved so fast so something else was amiss. Suddenly I realised I had put the “miles” instead of the “track” on the compass. Fortunately for me at that stage Bill handed the aircraft over to me, whereupon I “sneaked” the proper heading on the compass and made for Batavia. I'm not sure that Bill ever knew what I had done. We reached Batavia quite safely but I learned a lesson I've never forgotten. It was, however, a rotten but fortunately relatively short trip – complete darkness; heavy lightning which not only half blinded us but completely cut out all radio communications; torrential rain that sounded like a mob of goats on our fabric skin and which found every little seepage hole above our heads; no knowledge of what lay ahead, and by that time little knowledge of what lay behind us. That was on 10 January 1937, aircraft VH-USE, crew W. H. Crowther in command, Stevens First Officer.





Once when flying with Russell Tapp, having run up the motors and having got everything ready to leave Longreach for Brisbane, I went in search of Captain Tapp to report "All ready". It was still dark. I eventually found Russell pacing to and fro behind the hangar with a strained look on his face. His response to my report that all was ready for departure was somewhat terse and very much to the point; he said "To hell with the departure. We can't go yet. I haven't had my morning call." Russell was one of the old-time pilots who seemingly could not appreciate the luxury of a toilet aboard the DH86s!

### 1937 – Incident at Archerfield

This account, related by QEA's Instrument Engineer, George Roberts, took place in late December 1937 at Archerfield Aerodrome when the temperature had soared to 44 °C owing to a strong wind from the north-west.

"In the southeastern corner of the hangar, DH86 R.M.A. Brisbane was being serviced. Each undercarriage leg was supported on the twin-arms of mobile jacks since both port and starboard landing wheels had been removed. A wooden trestle was located about 2 meters forward of the port inboard engine, providing access for fuselage and cockpit window servicing. Flight Officer Fred Stevens was in the cockpit carrying out repairs to the radio. Apprentice Lance (Titch) Loney was engaged in cleaning the port inboard engine (which had had one of its magnetos removed for servicing) and engineer Ken Butler was detailed to check cylinder compression on all four engines. Within close proximity to the rear of the lower port mainplane, senior aircraftsman Bill Stone was working on the wing section from another aircraft.

"Ken Butler was going about his job methodically and entered the cockpit to ensure that all engine ignition switches were in the "off" position. He spoke briefly to Fred Stevens and pushed all four throttles fully forward before leaving the aircraft. Moving firstly to the starboard outboard engine, he pulled the propeller through its six compressions and then repeated the procedure on the starboard inboard engine before ducking under the nose to check the port inboard engine.

"The Gipsy VI engine was not supposed to start on full throttle but on this one occasion, assisted by the outside ambience, it coughed once and then sprang to life, roaring at full-bore on one magneto.

"Ken jumped clear quickly, but the aircraft (which was supported on the mobile jacks – each having tricycle undergear) moved forward immediately, the metal propeller striking the wooden trestle, demolishing it and casting the residue through the fabric side of the fuselage.

"'Titch' Loney kept his cool and tried desperately to short-circuit the port-side ignition by placing his arms across the six spark plugs, but was thrown backwards by the force of the

electric shock, sustaining severe burns to both arms. Bill Stone ran forward from his workplace and attempted unsuccessfully to clamber over the trailing edge of the wing to reach the engine controls, while the aircraft, now turning in a radius toward the store, was gathering speed.

"The commotion brought Arthur Baird and Ruth Trickett from their offices at the front northwestern corner of the hangar and just when catastrophe seemed imminent, the engine revs dropped, the noise subdued and the thrashing airscrew stopped. Fred Stevens, having extricated himself from the cramped position where he had been working on the radio located in the bulkhead, had closed down the throttle.

"The direct cause of the near-disaster was a break in the magneto earthing lead inside the insulation which could not be seen merely on visual inspection – an indirect cause was the unusually high temperature of the day. When the throttle was opened, the interconnected magneto control caused the lead to stretch thus parting the broken wire ends. Closing the throttle reversed the control and contact was regained."

Quoted from *A Tradition of Integrity – The Story of Qantas Engineering*, by Bruce Leonard, 1994, with kind permission from UNSW Press.

This envelope, addressed to Lester Brain by himself, was among the first airmail ever delivered from Suva to Sydney, on 28 October 1941. Brain gave it to Fred as a gift.





TELEGRAMS: "QANTAS"  
TELEPHONES: B3484-5

## QANTAS EMPIRE AIRWAYS LTD.

43 CREEK STREET  
BRISBANE  
QUEENSLAND

GUA/EL/269

6th August, 1937.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

This is to certify that Mr. F.W. Stevens has been employed by us from December 1934 to August 1937 as Senior First Officer and Wireless Operator Mechanic.

He has performed his many duties meticulously and has shown the greatest keenness at all times.

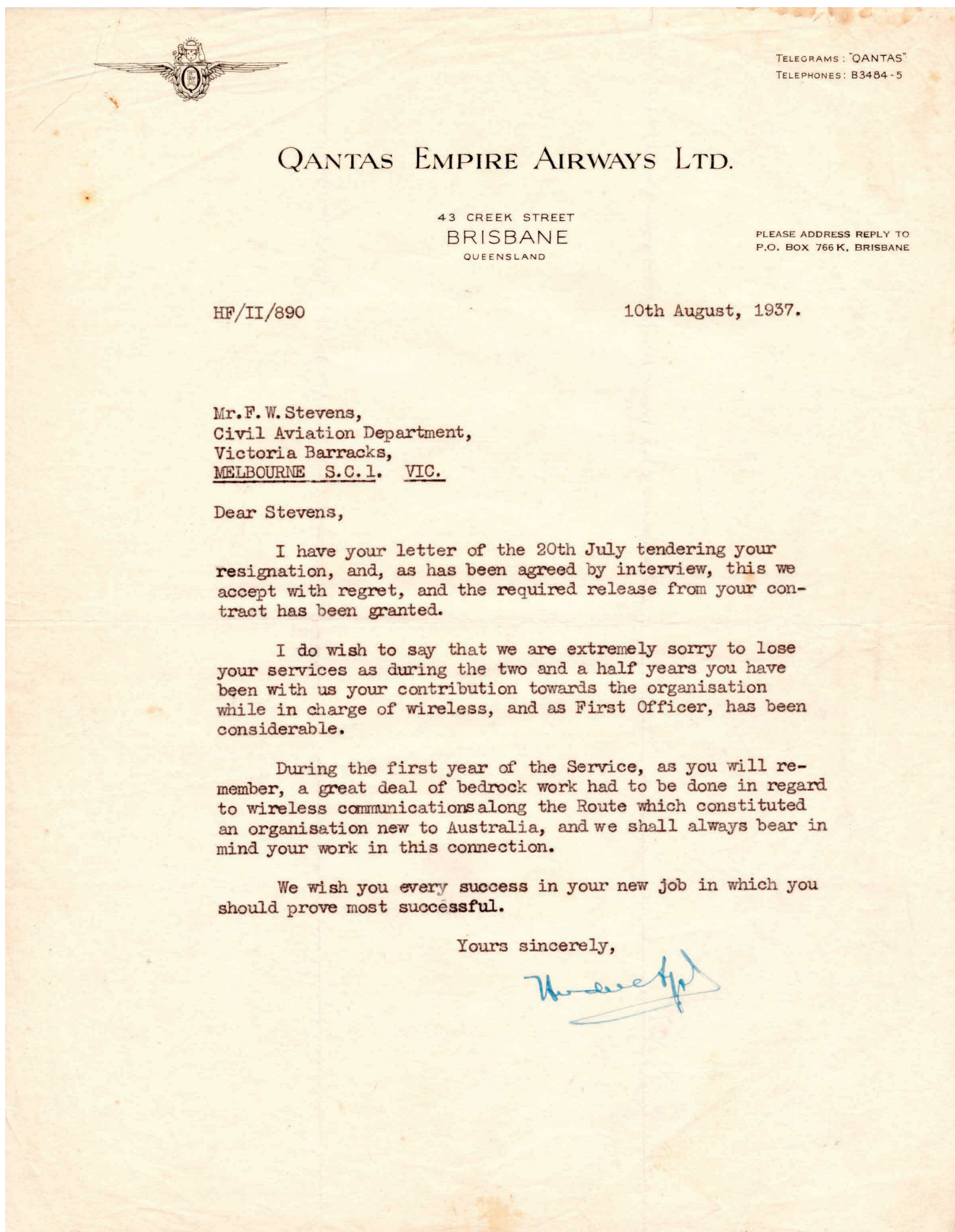
He is leaving us to take up a position with Civil Aviation and we are sorry to lose him.

I have no hesitation in recommending him to anyone who may require the services of a steady and knowledgeable man in any branch of practical wireless.

  
ACTING FLIGHT SUPERINTENDENT.

Reference from G. U. Allan.





Reference from Hudson Fysh.



TELEGRAMS: "QANTAS"  
TELEPHONES: B3484-5

# QANTAS EMPIRE AIRWAYS LTD.

43 CREEK STREET  
BRISBANE  
QUEENSLAND

PLEASE ADDRESS REPLY TO  
P.O. BOX 766 K, BRISBANE

HF/II/320

22nd September, 1937.

Mr. F. W. Stevens,  
c/o Civil Aviation Board,  
Victoria Barracks,  
MELBOURNE S.C.1. VIC.

Dear Stevens,

During my absence overseas you resigned from the Company and took over your new position with the Civil Aviation Board. While I am sorry to lose you from our staff, I congratulate you on your new appointment and wish you prosperity and success.

You joined this Company as First Officer pilot and Senior Radio Technician at the inception of our service to Singapore in 1934, and proved yourself a most efficient and loyal officer. Your work in developing the radio organisation and coping with the many original difficulties that arose was excellent, while your flying and performance of general route duties was sound and reliable. You carry with you the goodwill of the Company and your fellow officers.

Yours very truly,

FLIGHT SUPERINTENDENT.

Reference from Lester Brain.



## QEA DH86s

The first DH86 was built in four months, was registered G-ACPL and [was] first flown at Stag Lane on 14 January 1934.

A total of 64 DH86s, including 86<sub>A</sub>s and 86<sub>B</sub>s, were built before production ceased. The last DH86 to fly was G-ACZP, which was issued with her C. of A. [Certificate of Airworthiness] on 11 May 1935 and being the 21st DH86 to be built. This aircraft after 24 years was damaged beyond repair at Madrid on 21 September 1958.

Some details of the DH86:

- Engines Gipsy 6 4/205 h.p. [153 kW]
- Length 46.1 ft [14.0 m]

- Span 64.5 ft [19.7 m]
- Wing area 641 square feet [60 m<sup>2</sup>]
- Total weight 10,250 lbs [4.649 t]
- Wing loading 15.98 lbs/sq. ft [78.0 kg/m<sup>2</sup>]
- Cruising speed 145 m.p.h. [233 km/h]
- Original tankage 114 imperial gallons [518 L], increased for Australian requirements to 183 imperial gallons [832 L]

By May 1938 the five DH86s used by QEA on the Brisbane–Singapore route had flown 2½ million miles [4 million km] and completed every one of 525 scheduled flights, 90% of their terminal arrivals being within 60 minutes of time table.

In more detail the QEA DH86s are discussed below:

Registration letters	Aircraft name	Constructor's number	C. of A. issued	Remarks
VH-USC	RMA Canberra	2307	13-9-34	Flown by captain Brain from England to Australia, departed Croydon 24 Sept 1934, arrived Brisbane 13 Oct 1934. passed to MacRobertson Miller 1939, impressed as A31-5, restored to QEA, crashed at Barwin 9 Oct 1944. At this stage VH-USC in 10 years had flown 11,664 hours covering a mileage equal to a flight between Australia and England once a month during the whole period
VH-USD	RMA Brisbane	2308	24-9-34	Shipped to Brisbane by sea. Sold to TATA Airlines Ltd 1940 as VT-AKZ. Impressed June 1940 as AX800
VH-USE	RMA Sydney	2309	2-10-34	Shipped to Brisbane by sea. Crashed near Brisbane 2 Feb 1942 (Capt. Swaffield)
VH-USF	RMA Melbourne	2310	27-12-54	Used in England for tests after loss of VH-USG then delivered to Singapore by IAL. Flown thence to Brisbane by QEA. Impressed as A31-6, restored as VH-USF to MacRobertson Miller, crashed at Geraldton 23 June 1945 (Capt. Branch)
VH-UUA	RMA Adelaide	2306	14-2-35	Initially IAL G-ACWE. Replacement for VH-USG lost near Longreach during IAL delivery flight 15 Nov 1934. Delivered to Singapore by IAL thence flown to Brisbane on scheduled run by Brain and Stevens. Sold to TATA Airlines Ltd 1940 as VT-AMK, impressed July 1942 as HX789



### *DH100 Vampire*

First jet to operate from a carrier on 3 December 1945.

### *DH88 Comet Racer*

Five were built primarily for the London–Melbourne Centenary Air Race in 1934. First DH88 was flown on 9 May 1934.

The DH88R:

- Length 29 ft [8.8 m]
- Span 44 ft [13.4 m]
- Wing area 213 sq. ft [19.8 m<sup>2</sup>]
- Total weight 5,555 lbs [2.520 t]
- Wing loading 26.05 lbs/sq. foot [127 kg/m<sup>2</sup>]
- Speed 237 m.p.h. maximum [381 km/h]
- Engines Gipsy 6R 2/230 h.p. [172 kW]
- Range over 3,000 miles [>5000 km]

Winners of speed event in London–Melbourne Air Race were Charles W. A. Scott and [Tom] Campbell Black in G-ACSS (Race No. 34) in 70 hours 54 minutes 18 seconds. They refuelled at Kirkuk (Iraq), Baghdad (Iraq), Allahabad (India), Singapore, Darwin and Charleville.

### *Data involving de Havilland Stag Lane Factory*

At the Stag Lane Factory during the 1939–45 War, although there were many bombing raids, not one direct hit was recorded. During this time, 10,000 Gipsy engines were made, 3,800 Gipsy engines were overhauled, more than 9,000 Merlin engines were overhauled and 23,000 propellers were made.

At two DH factories including Stag Lane during the War in England, 40,000 propellers were repaired, some being repaired several times.

### **The QEA DH86 radio equipment**

Each of the five DH86 aircraft – VH-USC, VH-USD, VH-USE, VH-USF and VH-UUA (which replaced the lost VH-USG during delivery by Imperial Airways) – was fitted with almost identical radio equipment. For all practical purposes the equipment, component by component, could be exchanged between aircraft. It was Marconi equipment.

Basically the equipment consisted of the following:

1. A multi-purpose high-frequency/low-frequency transmitter. It was not crystal controlled but operated on the MOPA [Master Oscillator Power Amplifier] principle. The high-frequency (short-wave) section

could be “tuned” to any desired frequency between about 4 megacycles [= MHz] and 8.5 megacycles. We normally transmitted, when using high frequency, on about 6540 kilocycles [= kHz]. (Note: This frequency was later adopted by DCA as a common high frequency throughout Australia and Papua New Guinea. It was guarded by all DCA aeradio stations for about 25 years and was carried in all Australian registered and radio-equipped aircraft. This frequency, when it became overloaded, was relegated to a regional frequency but is still used to great advantage in this capacity. QEA used this 6540 kilocycles from the inception of DH86s because it was considered within QEA to be an outstandingly suitable frequency for the purpose and over the distances involved.)

The low-frequency (now more correctly known as medium-frequency) section could be tuned to any desired frequency between about 289 kilocycles and 600 kilocycles. We normally transmitted on about 535 kilocycles for communication with such aeronautical stations as then existed, or on 500 kilocycles for communication with Coastal Radio Stations and ships at sea.

Transmissions were made on either straight continuous wave (CW), or on interrupted continuous wave (ICW). (Note: This was not modulated continuous wave {MCW} as would normally be used today.) Voice transmission, excepting for a few preliminary tests which proved the facility in this type of equipment to be almost useless and in any event of no real practical value, was not used. All communication was by means of the Morse code using almost entirely the long-established marine (ships at sea) practices and procedures.

Power for the transmitter (and for the receivers, aircraft lighting, and engine starters) was derived from a battery similar to that used in a motor car, and charged in flight by a wind-driven generator positioned at the leading edge of the port-side upper wing.

Excepting for relatively close-in working when a “fixed” aerial was used, transmissions were mainly effected via a “trailing” aerial. A hand winch (incidentally very inconveniently located) was used to let out or wind in about 200 feet of stranded copper aerial wire with beaded lead weights at the distant end.

2. A multi-purpose high-frequency/medium-frequency receiver. As in the case of the transmitter, the receiver was not crystal controlled. However, although the receiver when being used on high frequency in particular did “drift” somewhat, it was a remarkably reliable and efficient receiver. It could be tuned, in





two bands, which approximated those available in the transmitter.

The DH86s were neither screened nor (during the very early days) fully bonded. As a result of this deficiency, ignition induction from eight magnetos made reception on high frequency almost impossible and in any event quite unreliable in the air. On the ground, with the motors off, reception was excellent and on two occasions in particular I used high frequency on the ground to considerable advantage. Once was to work with Singapore from Batavia on the occasion of the delay that brought about the "Lost and Found" episode. The second important occasion was at Singapore when, having blown a tyre, we were able to communicate direct with Darwin and arrange for the quick delivery of a replacement.

Reception on medium frequency, on the other hand, was normally quite effective and some surprising distances were covered, particularly on 222 kilocycles. Atmospheric disturbances, particularly during the north-west monsoon season, were often troublesome.

In general terms it can be said that we transmitted on 6540 kilocycles and received on 333 (or as circumstances required) on 509 kilocycles.

3. A Direction Finding attachment. Today's ADF (automatic direction finding) equipment in aircraft consists basically of a small rotatable "loop", an independent receiver, a meter calibrated as is a magnetic compass, and a pair of headphones. Recognising deficiencies that are encountered when using medium frequencies on any type of direction-finding equipment (so-called "night" effect and others), the present airborne ADF has considerable uses. This was far from the case with the DH86 equipment. In the first the "loop" was not by itself rotatable. The wire forming the loop was wound round the inside of the back freight locker. The only possible means of "rotating" the loop was to rotate the aircraft. In a dire emergency this might have been [an] acceptable proposition. However, any thought of normally swinging the nose of an aircraft to and fro over possibl[y] 90°, particularly with passengers aboard, was quite unacceptable. Apart from this disability, which was pronounced in itself, there was no independent receiver nor was there anything approaching reliability in the "sensing" facilities. For practical purposes it was impossible, even were some form of bearing obtained, to determine whether the signals were coming from ahead or astern. I experimented with a loop in the nose locker with slightly better but still unacceptable results. I heard that Imperial Airways were having good results

with this type of DF equipment in their AW 15 aircraft west of Singapore. I made two voluntary runs between Singapore and Alor Star with Imperials but I could not be convinced that their DF results were better than ours. In fact the swinging to and fro of an AW 15 was a major operation, slow and tedious, and to my way of thinking totally unacceptable for a passenger-carrying aircraft. After about a year of seriously trying to make the DF on the DH80s work satisfactorily, we gave it away and dismantled the "loop" in the back locker where it was a hindrance when loading baggage and cargo.

I now turn for a few minutes to the actual use of the equipment discussed above.

During each flight from Brisbane to Singapore and return, we transmitted half-hourly position reports. While there was one service a week the transmission times were at 18 and 48 minutes past each hour. When the second weekly service commenced, that service took on 03 and 53 minutes past the hour as its scheduled reporting times. We gave our known or D/R [dead reckoning] position plus an ETA, or amended ETA as appropriate. While there was no levity in our communications, there were occasionally exchanges of a personal or semi-personal nature. I recall that when the Camooweal Postmaster (Harold Stiff, and a personal friend) became a part of the "system" in 1935, I had but to add to our position report the letters "FWS" (my initials) to be sure that the Ryliys would have ready for me a plate of sausages and eggs when we landed for breakfast.

Usually someone along the track would receive our report, be it the Coastal Radio Station at Brisbane, Darwin, Soerabaya or Batavia; the aeronautical station at Palembang; the RAF station at Singapore, or a radio amateur such as Eddie (brother of QEA Neville) Hagarty at Longreach, or perhaps Don Shearer, an enthusiastic School Teacher at Quamby near Cloncurry. I always carried with me a home-made portable receiver specially adapted to receive QEA aircraft transmissions. At Darwin I was usually able to hear the aircraft throughout most of the flights [from] Brisbane to Singapore and return. At Brisbane and Singapore I could usually hear them when they were within the nearer half of the flight. There were few, and widely spaced, ground stations capable of responding to the aircraft transmissions and in any event, quite often, transmissions were not heard by anyone, but only because nobody was listening.

The weakest links in the communication chain were between Roma and Daly Waters wherein no ground



station, supposing the aircraft transmissions had been heard, [was] capable of transmitting on the aircraft frequencies, and between Rambang (Lombok Island) and the Sumatra coastline north of Batavia. In this latter area we were required to take our place with ships at sea and “fight” for attention from the Soerabaya and Batavia Coastal Radio Stations. I would demonstrate this unsatisfactory state of affairs by the following short story. On one occasion that I clearly recall, I asked Soerabaya for a local weather report. We were then about 150 miles east of Soerabaya. We finally received the weather report at a position about 150 miles west of Soerabaya. In the meantime we had landed at Soerabaya, exchanged mails, refuelled and proceeded on our way.

The standard of aeronautical communications on the Brisbane to Singapore route, particularly during 1935 and 1936, was of a very low order. The real weakness lay in the fact that, apart from Palembang in Sumatra, there was not one reasonably equipped aeronautical communication station. The DH86 equipment, accepting certain inadequate elements by today's standards, was itself quite good. Given sufficient adequately equipped ground stations along the Brisbane to Singapore route we should never have been out of communication with the ground. The airborne equipment, which was of Marconi origin, was remarkably reliable, robust, and in the hands of qualified radio operators extremely efficient. There were occasions, however, when we could have called our heads off; we could have been “in the drink”, or we could have been “down” in the tiger country between Cloncurry and Mt Isa, or around Lombok and Bali, and nobody would have known that anything was amiss until we failed to arrive somewhere. Fortunately we always did arrive but this was due to other factors. There was the high standard of aircraft maintenance; strict but fair discipline; responsible supervision; and (although I had the honour to be one of them) an outstanding set of crew members who pulled well together; and overall Management that “saw fair play”.

I cannot at this stage provide details of type and serial numbers. If these are required some research will be necessary. In the meantime I shall give a short running commentary on the equipment and touch upon its uses.

There were two receivers and one transmitter. Neither the receivers nor the transmitter were “crystal controlled”. The transmitter was of the type known then as MOPA (master oscillator power amplifier). It could be used on straight CW (continuous wave), ICW (interrupted continuous wave), or on voice. For several rea-

sons that I shall not go into here, the voice transmissions were not satisfactory and, apart from some initial testing, were not used. Morse was the main means of communication.

The transmitter was capable of being “tuned” over a fairly wide range in two steps. On the high-frequency side the coverage was from somewhere about 4 megacycles up to about 8.5 megacycles. The frequency in use could not (due to certain inadequacies in the equipment) be precisely set nor having set the frequency could one be sure that, when next the transmitter was switched on, the same frequency would be available. Normally, on the high-frequency side, we used something around 6540 kilocycles, which proved to be a most satisfactory frequency for the purpose. Indeed, when I later went to DCA, I was instrumental in having 6540 kilocycles retained throughout Australia as the “emergency” frequency which was guarded by every aeradio station, which procedure still applied when I retired from DCA in 1963. On the low-frequency side the frequency coverage extended from somewhere about 280 kilocycles to something around 600 kilocycles. We used 333 kcs for D/F [direction finding] when such ground facilities were available and for communication with ground stations (except Soerabaya and Batavia, of which more later) when high frequency was not suitable or not necessary. We also used it from time to time to “natter” between QEA aircraft when passing each other en route. We used 500 kcs (now a maritime distress and calling frequency) for occasional communication with ships at sea. I had a friend who was Wireless Operator at that time on the SS *Marella*, a BP steamer that traded between Melbourne and Singapore via the east coast. Whenever *Marella* was in the area anywhere between Brisbane and Singapore I could be sure of making wireless contact with that ship. 500 kcs was also used for communication with the Coastal Radio Stations at Soerabaya and Batavia. There was then no other station in Java with whom we could communicate. Working on 500 kcs, however, had its problems as we were forced to “fight” for a place on the air against many ships at sea and all wanting priority, and most of the ships having a transmitter power far in excess of ours – a ratio of something around 30 to 1.

On the receiving side, one receiver covered both high frequency and medium frequency. We could receive, by tuning the receiver, either 335 kcs or 500 kcs. High frequency, however, was seldom used for reception simply because, due to a lack of bonding and ignition screening in the aircraft, “noise level” in the headphones was too high in comparison with signal





level. There were occasions, however, when it would work but usually this was when it was least needed. Occasionally I would tune in to an amateur band and contact an enthusiastic amateur probably thousands of miles away from me. Once I recall, when flying between Mt Isa and Camooweal during the early hours of one morning, establishing good high-frequency communication with another friend who happened to be a light keeper at Gabo Island – Bob Jordan by name.

The second receiver was provided as a part of the aircraft's D/F facilities. As a receiver it was very good when used with the aircraft's normal trailing aerial. The weakness in the D/F facilities aboard the aircraft rested squarely on the type of D/F "loop" installed. Now, in these enlightened times and over the past few years, the aircraft "loop" aerial is compact, easily rotated and adequately designed. Our "loop" was not like the modern version. It consisted of about 20 turns of stranded, rubber-insulated wire wound on formers around the inside of the after freight locker. There was no means by which the loop could be rotated other than to rotate [the aircraft] (swing the nose to and from over about 90°) and hope to get a bearing. In addition, the wire that formed the loop somehow could not be kept rigid, and as a result it bounced about in turbulence. I made a strenuous effort to get bearings on this equipment but, for one thing, few captains were prepared to swing the aircraft to and fro as I have just outlined. If there were passengers this was a most disconcerting procedure. I heard that Imperial Airways were having some success with this type of equipment in their AW 15 type aircraft so I made two voluntary runs with them between Singapore and Alor Star to see for myself. Provided the aircraft was swung rather violently to and fro, there was a little better result in the AW 15 but still far from good. We eventually took the so-called loop out of the DH86s and used the receiver only as a stand-by to the normal (medium frequency) receiver. In the meantime I had tried an experimental loop in the front freight locker but, while it proved a little better than the loop in the back locker, the need to swing the aircraft to and fro made it a completely unsatisfactory arrangement.

On the actual operating side, as I said earlier, Morse was the essential means of communication. Each of the First Officers, and at least one captain at that time, held a First Class Wireless Licence. A lack of ground stations was our real problem particularly and strangely within Australia. When the QEA service to Singapore commenced operation, the following ground radio facilities were available:

**Brisbane.** The Coastal Radio Station opened a listen-

ing watch on 6540 kcs for 3 minutes each half hour during the first day's flight (Brisbane to Cloncurry). We transmitted a position report each half hour. Between Brisbane and about Roma we could work two-way with Brisbane, but after Roma we could not receive [owing to] distance. During the second day's flight (Cloncurry to Darwin) we again transmitted a report each half hour which Darwin Coastal Radio Station copied. Upon reaching the vicinity of Birdum we again were able to work two-way, this time with Darwin. On the two-days' flight from Darwin to Singapore we sent a position report each half hour as we did while crossing Australia. Between Darwin and Koepang, Darwin kept a continuous watch and, usually (being over water) we were able to maintain two-way contact until landing [at] Koepang. Koepang itself had a makeshift transmitter/receiver which provided some sort of a service while we flew between Koepang and Rambang. I personally, however, encouraged both Darwin and Broome Coastal Radio Stations to watch for us over this section and seldom missed making a contact with one or the other of those two stations. From departure [from] Rambang to a position some 100 miles or so beyond Batavia we were required to fall back on the shipping frequencies, as mentioned above. Once we were well past Batavia, we could, normally, work Palembang, which was the only properly equipped and manned aeronautical radio station between Brisbane and Singapore. Even Singapore itself was an RAF station that gave us civilians a second-grade service if they had RAF exercises under way. We held on to Palembang to the last possible moment and changed over to Singapore only for a last-minute weather report and to give a final ETA. These circumstances persisted for almost two years, after which a much improved service (with added equipment) was provided by Darwin and, still later, by Brisbane. The unsatisfactory gap between Koepang and Palembang still existed when I left QEA after 3 years' service and 72 crossings of the affected area. With the lack of really good radio services on the Brisbane–Singapore run I am amazed, when I look back, that never was an aircraft lost nor, as far as I know, a single person injured. Although I was one of them, the crews who flew that route did a really marvellous job with, admittedly, a marvellously reliable aircraft maintained by a dedicated ground crew. In retrospect I am indeed proud to have been associated with the birth of QEA.

**Palembang,** the next radio station on the route, if the operator had been advised of our movements, was an oasis in the desert. He was equipped with a good set of equipment, including direction-finding facilities and,



once alerted, kept a good watch and set a high standard of operating efficiency. Whether or not we went into Palembang for fuel or bypassed the place on a direct track for Singapore, the operators at Palembang were always (in my experience) helpful in all respects. The final station was at **Singapore**, which was operated by the RAF. Normally he gave reasonable service but this standard fell off when there were RAF exercises in the area. A shortage of trained radio personnel was usually given as a reason for this falling off of standard.

In addition to the official stations mentioned above, I always carried with me a home-made portable receiver and spent many hours watching the progress of QEA aircraft. At Singapore I could normally start to receive the aircraft after departure westbound from Koepang and hold the aircraft eastbound to about Rambang. At Darwin I could normally hear the aircraft, although not always copy all details due to weak signals, almost anywhere between Brisbane and Singapore. It might reasonably be asked why, if I could do this, could recognised stations [not] do likewise? There are several reasons, perhaps the main being that I, as the senior QEA radio man, had a keen interest in proceedings. I would “struggle” to hear and if possible read signals that would often be passed over as useless by the operator (particularly those outside Australia) that had no more than a bread-and-butter interest.

By present-day standards, QEA, during the DH86 operations, were often “out of communication” and, if the present-day SAR [search and rescue] alerting service [had] been operating, too often would DH86S [have] been “overdue”. The DH86s, even with their radio weaknesses in some respects, were fully capable of maintaining two-way communication.

I would turn now, for a few minutes, to the actual use of the equipment discussed above.

Throughout each flight [from] Brisbane to Singapore and return, we transmitted half-hourly position reports on 6540 kilocycles. Someone usually heard these reports, either the Brisbane Coastal Radio Station, an amateur radio operator at Longreach by name Eddie Hagarty (and a brother of Nevil[le], a QEA engineer), the Radio Postmaster at Camooweal, the Coastal Radio Station at Darwin, a part-time station at Koepang, the Coastal Radio Stations at Soerabaya or Batavia, the aeronautical (and only one on the route) station at Palembang, or the RAF station at Singapore. Over some of the route, however, we could not obtain acknowledgements for these reports. We could normally receive Brisbane on 333 kilocycles as far as Roma. During the first years or so and until the Postmaster at Camooweal was authorised to communicate with us, our next two-way contact would be with Darwin from a position near Birdum. We were able, normally, to maintain two-way contact with Darwin from departure there until landing [in] Koepang. Between Koepang and Soerabaya via Rambang there was some “hit and miss”. Broome Coastal Radio Station, although not a recognised station in the scheme, could often be contacted after applying a little communication “noise”. Soerabaya and Batavia, although authorised stations, treated us on equivalent terms with ships at sea. We took our turn. Our speed of around 135 knots meant nothing to the operators at Soerabaya and Batavia, who were used to working with ships operating at speeds probably little higher than 10 or 12 knots. I recall asking Soerabaya for a local weather report while we were about 100 miles to the east, and receiving the report when we were about 100 miles to the west, having in the meantime landed, refuelled, and departed again.



## 1937, Department of Civil Aviation

After leaving Qantas in August 1937, Fred joined the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) as a Communications Officer. His initial role was to set up an effective radio communications network across Australia, and this involved much travelling. To make his time more productive, he frequently piloted himself in aircraft hired from private operators, being qualified to fly DH60,

DH82, DH80, DH83, DH86, DH90, Stinson, DC2, DC3, Monospar, Lockheed 10, Lockheed 14 and Short Brothers flying boat. His last turn at "handling the stick" was as one of a selected group of "older civilian aircrew" who flew one of the many Catalina aircraft, built in San Diego, to Australia during the early part of WW2.



Above: Aerial view of Goroka, New Guinea, 1950s. Below: Junkers JU52, Minj, New Guinea, 1950s.







"A utilitarian DC3 en route Lae to Rabaul. Anything up to 30 natives complete with bundles, dogs etc. travel this way."

New Guinea highland men and boys and aeroplane, Minj, 1950s.





## 1942–1945, Royal Australian Air Force

Owing to his expertise in both radio and flying, Fred was called up to the RAAF on 23 July 1942 as a Flying Officer, later promoted to Flight Lieutenant, on “administrative

and special duties”. He served mostly in Queensland and New Guinea. During this time he divorced Cecily and married Nance.



Fred in uniform, around 1943.




Fred (far right) on duty with RAAF, at Morotai, New Guinea, around 1943.

RAAF march in Brisbane, 16 March 1945. Fred is marked by a small red dot near his feet.





R.A.A.F. FORM P/P. 118 (REVISED JULY 1945)



**ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE**  
**OFFICER'S CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

Nº 27952

Surname: STEVENS Christian Names: Frederick William

Official Number: 251424

Branch of the Service: Administrative and Special Duties

Date of Appointment to a Commission: 23rd July, 1942.

Rank on Appointment: Pilot Officer

Substantive Rank on Termination of Service on the Active List of the R.A.A.F.: Flying Officer

Temporary Rank on Termination of Service on the Active List of the R.A.A.F.: Flight Lieutenant

Highest Acting Rank Held: Flight Lieutenant

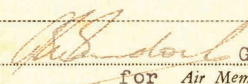
Date of Termination of Service on the Active List of the R.A.A.F.: 25th September, 1945.

Reason for Termination of Service on the Active List of the R.A.A.F.: On demobilisation

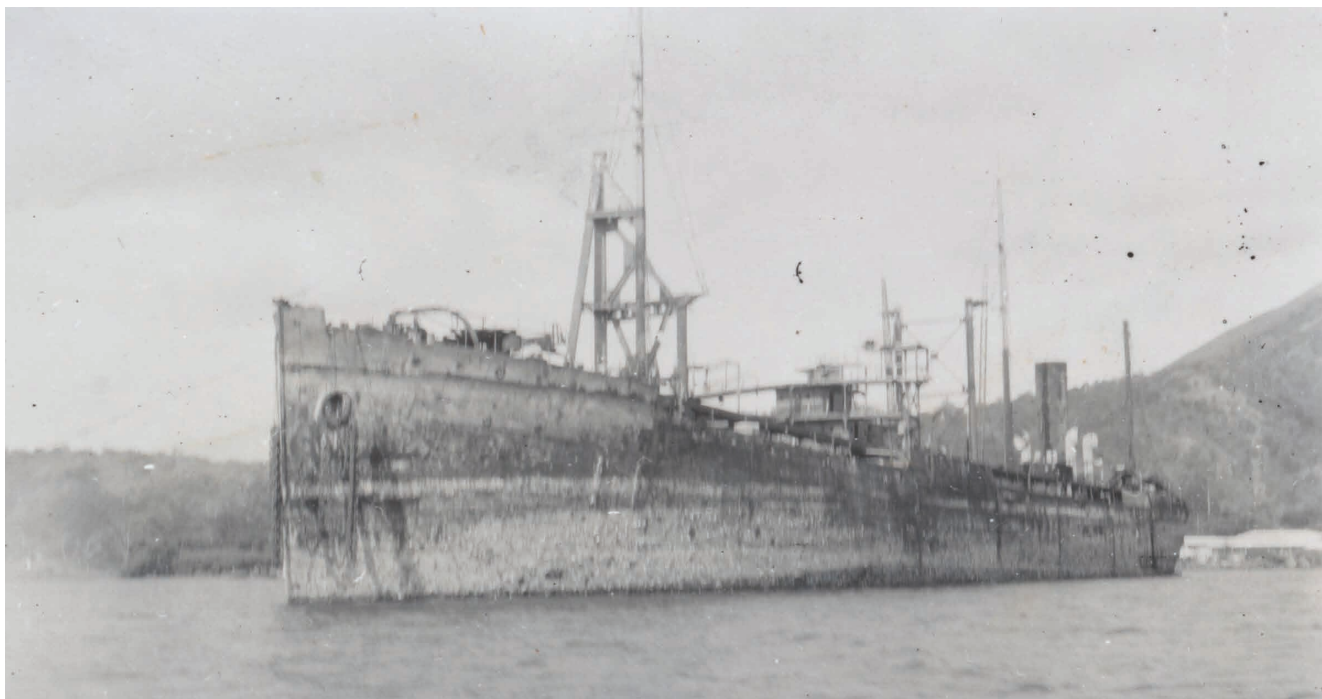
Honours and Awards: 1939-45 Star, Pacific Star.

Remarks: Eligible for Returned from Active Service Badge.

Date: 24th July, 1946.

  
 Group Captain,  
 for Air Member for Personnel.

W.A.H. 15M 1/46 B33



"Reputed to be the mother-ship of the Japanese midget submarines that attacked Sydney, now afloat again in Rabaul Harbour [1950s]."



## 1945, Old ghosts at Daly Waters

In the days before COM Supervisors, when we were “one happy family” directed, guided, employed and transferred by a central “Radio Inspector”, it fell to my lot to investigate a staff matter at Daly Waters. I sent the SCO [Senior Communications Officer] south and took over the station pending the arrival of the new SCO. One of the first obvious jobs to be done was to clean out old records, logs, newspapers, magazines, u/s [unserviceable] tubes, burnt-out resistors etc.

Old papers were piled into a 44 gallon petrol drum serving as an incinerator, and to make a good bonfire an enthusiastic COM officer assisting me suggested splashing some kerosene on the papers. Unfortunately, my enthusiastic assistant selected petrol instead of kerosene – a loud “boom” resulted, and there was I minus eyebrows, moustache and some skin plus a sore eye. Daly Waters was really burned into my soul.

My ghost story concerns Karumba, the old and now discarded Flying Boat Base some miles down the river from Normanton. I was there when the Prime Minister of the day and the present Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, was heard on Radio Australia to broadcast: “It is my mournful duty to announce that Great Britain is at war with Germany.”

Security measures were immediately introduced at Karumba and an armed guard [was] mounted! As, however, the only lethal weapon on the base was a lonely .303 rifle it was necessary to make a strategic decision as to whether the living quarters or the remote transmitters should be protected; the remote transmitters won. Having completed my task at Karumba and awaiting south-bound transport I volunteered to take the first guard doggo.

The night was quiet; all was peaceful and war seemed to be and in fact was far away. There was an occasional rustle of leaves as the sea breeze gently tossed the branches of the high trees; an occasional wallaby collided with the wire fence that surrounded the transmitter building. At 2 am I boiled the billy on a primus stove and made tea. Again all was quiet and peaceful as I “did my rounds” and inspected the grounds for intruders. As I re-entered the building to enjoy my hard-earned cup of tea a “terrific crash” rent the air; the hairs at the back of my neck stood erect; I brought my trusted .303 to the ready and awaited developments. Seconds of suspense that seemed like hours followed until I realised that the handle of the billy that had been standing erect had toppled down and “crashed” against the side of the billy. I am now convinced that the greatest amplifier of sound is one’s mind; you

cannot even guess how much amplification my mind gave to that tinny sound. I later discovered that the safety catch of the .303 was “on” and perhaps that was fortunate should a friend and not a foe have appeared on the scene. May the ghosts of Karumba, and Groote Island [sic] and the other Flying Boat Bases live on and may they remind us from time to time of a phase of civil flying, outstanding though it was, that will never come again.

Local newspaper 1945.

## AIREY'S INLET

A link with the past has been created by a recent holiday visit of Flight Lieutenant F. W. Stevens and his wife to Airey's Inlet. Flight Lieutenant Stevens, who served with the Navy during the last war, has recently completed 3½ years with the R.A.A.F., much of which has been connected with operations in New Guinea, Morotai and Borneo. Older residents of Airey's Inlet will remember Fred Stevens as the elder son of Mrs. Stevens, now living at Point Lonsdale, and the late Mr. G. F. W. Stevens, who, on two occasions some years ago, served as lighthouse keeper at the Split Point lighthouse, Airey's Inlet.

During his recent visit to Airey's Inlet, Flight Lieutenant Stevens, with his wife spent much time fishing on the rocks and renewing acquaintance with beauty spots he knew so well, as a schoolboy. He did not follow his father's footsteps and enter the lighthouse service, but turned his attention to aeroplanes. At the completion of his leave at Airey's Inlet he will visit his mother and sister at Point Lonsdale and then take up duty as Supervisor of Airways with the Department of Civil Aviation at Brisbane. However, the lighthouse tradition is being carried on by his younger son, George, who is an apprentice on the lighthouse steamer Cape Yorke. His elder son, Dick, has served for 3½ years as a Commando in the Army, and on several occasions he and his father have crossed each other's paths and spent short periods together in various parts of New Guinea and Morotai.



Left to right: Frederick William Stevens, Nancy Alumward Sim, Jess Cooper (good friend of Nance's), Archibald Victor ('Vic') Sim (brother of Nance and father of Kay Sim), 7 April 1945, St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brisbane.





## 1946–1966, DCA, RAAF, MBE and retirement

Following the end of WW2, Fred was released back to DCA, where he worked for the next 16 years as a superintendent of wireless communications in Australia and what later became PNG. He was often away from home. This had become a bone of contention during the 1930s, when he was away flying and left Cecily and their two children home in Brisbane, where she knew nobody. Back in Melbourne in the early 1940s, with Fred in New Guinea more often than not with the RAAF, Cecily found “other interests”. An acquaintance took her along to a hospital where she visited wounded soldiers convalescing. There Cecily met David Davidson, who had likely developed “shell shock” in WW1. It’s not clear whether David served in WW2 also. Cecily decided to leave Fred and took up with David in around 1943 (she was listed as next of kin in 1942 but not in 1945). This caused enormous ructions in the family, and their son George found it necessary to leave home at 16 and run away to sea. Their divorce was granted on 2 May 1944, with David as co-respondent.

Back in Brisbane, it seems that Fred visited the Union Jack Club, at 183 Wickham Terrace, an establishment founded to offer lodging and services to members of the armed forces; perhaps he stayed there when he was not away on service. He met Nancy Alumward Sim, who worked there as a volunteer, and they married on 7 April

1945, while he still served in the RAAF. They settled in Brisbane after WW2, and their son, Ian Bruce Stevens, was born on 27 July 1947.

Fred continued to move with his work, and they moved to Sydney in 1952, to 83 Bangor Street, just 100 m from 83 Berwick Street, where George met his future wife. George wrote: “I would visit them occasionally from *Albatross*. And on one particular occasion they told me about a terrible thing that had happened to a neighbour who lived in the street behind. He was driving home in his car to do a right hand turn into his street facing directly into the sunlight in the west. As he turned a young fellow came hooting down the road on the correct side, but straight into the car, which was a big old Chrysler weighing about 13 hundredweight, flew over the top and was killed. As a consequence, the fellow driving the car had suffered a traumatic experience and they knew who this fellow was, and he was a neighbour. So I went around there one day when I heard this, to offer my sympathies, and he happened to be Shirley’s father.”

Later they moved again, this time to Melbourne, where they stayed for the rest of Fred’s life. Their house was a brick bungalow in the California style at 2 Kyarra Road, Glen Iris, where Fred enjoyed pottering in his productive vegetable garden. It was demolished in the 1980s to widen a freeway.

Fred (back left), probably with DCA staff, late 1950s.





## AU REVOIR FRED STEVENS

Away back about in 1911 Fred Stevens, a bright faced youngster joined the P.M.G.'s Department as a telegraph messenger — today November 15th, 1962 he retires in the fullness of time from the Department and the service he has served so well.

Fred has had a very full and colourful career, some of the highlights of which are: that he holds the number one Flight Radio Operator's licence, he had a Navigator and Pilot's ticket and also a Flight Engineer's licence.

Sometime early in the first world war he joined the Navy as a radio operator and almost immediately got a shore appointment to lonely Esperance, but was sent to New Guinea instead. Later, many well known ports of the world were in his itinerary. After the real war ended and the phoney peace began Fred, amongst other achievements, had that of being the radio operator who kept in sole contact with the late Sir Charles Kingsford Smith during his epic Pacific Flight in the 'Southern Cross'; he later joined Qantas as a Flight Radio Operator, later becoming Navigator and Pilot on the Sydney-Singapore run — Sometime here, either before Qantas or just after, he was for a while station engineer at 4QG Brisbane when it was a commercial station.

In 1937 he rejoined the Commonwealth Public Service

in the old Civil Aviation Board while it was still a branch of the Defence Department.

In 1942 the call to active service was too strong to resist and he joined the R.A.A.F. as a Signals Officer. Here he served on special duties directed from R.A.A.F. Headquarters until the end of hostilities, when he rejoined the now Department of Civil Aviation as Superintendent of Airways Operations in Queensland and in 1949 he transferred to the same position in N.S.W. In 1954, when Ted Betts moved overseas, Fred came to Head Office as Superintendent of Communications and it is from this position that he now retires. He will, this afternoon, receive a farewell presentation from his Head Office associates. Tonight, in the Henty Theatre, the farewell will be in the usual style and a presentation, to which his many friends throughout the Commonwealth have contributed, will be made to him.

The writer has only known Fred since his R.A.A.F. days, when we first met at the foot of Castle Hill, Townsville, but the friendship has continued and many times recently he has come to my aid, as Editor of A.I.R., with the contribution of many interesting articles for A.I.R. under the nom de plume "The Paid Tourist". We hope he gives us more enjoyment with more articles of his many and varied experiences. It is the wish and hope of all that he long enjoys his days of his retirement.

*Aviation Institute Review.*

George, Nance, Ian and Fred, around 1952.





## MBE

In the New Year's Honours List on 1 January 1963, it was announced that Fred had been awarded an MBE for services to aviation. At the investiture, on 25 February 1963, HM Queen Elizabeth II bestowed his medal. At the same ceremony, she awarded a knighthood to Elisabeth Murdoch, mother of the media mogul Rupert, and an OBE to Bill Woodfull, the cricketer (and Cecily's cousin). Fred received letters of congratulations from many people, including Sir Hudson Fysh, Sir Lester Brain, Bill Woodfull, Sir Robert Menzies (Prime Minister) and Harold Hold (a later Prime Minister).

## Final years

Also on 1 January 1963, Fred retired officially from DCA. But only a year later (details are not known), he started work again, this time as a clerk in the Touring Records Section of the RACV, for which he wrote copious travel articles for tourists within Victoria. These articles are included as an appendix in this book.

He began typing these memoirs in 1965. In about September 1966 he suffered a heart attack. Although he survived that, he died of a second heart attack at home on 5 October 1966. He was 68 years old. His ashes are immured at Springvale Crematorium.



Fred's medals. From left: MBE, 1914–15 British War Medal, Mercantile Marine War Medal, 1939–45 Pacific Star, 1939–45 War Medal, 1939–45 Australian Service Medal.



Elizabeth R

**Elizabeth the Second**, *by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom, Australia and Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith and Sovereign of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire to Our trusty and well beloved Frederick William Stevens Esquire*

*Greeting*  
**Whereas** *We have thought fit to nominate and appoint you to be an Ordinary Member of the Civil Division of Our said Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.*

**We do** *by these presents grant unto you the Dignity of an Ordinary Member of Our said Order and hereby authorise you to have hold and enjoy the said Dignity and Rank of an Ordinary Member of Our aforesaid Order together with all and singular the privileges thereunto belonging or appertaining.*

**Given** *at Our Court, at Saint James's under Our Sign Manual and the Seal of Our said Order this First day of January 1963 in the Eleventh year of Our Reign.*

*By the Sovereign's Command.*

*W. H. P.*  
*Grand Master.*

*Grant of the Dignity of an Ordinary Member of the Civil Division of the Order of the British Empire to Frederick William Stevens, Esq.*



GEELONG ADVERTISER

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1963

# Men, Women And Their Careers

Who remembers the year 1910, when the Queenscliff Council paid 1/- for each 100 sparrows eggs delivered to the town hall? Frederick William Stevens, M.B.E., was one of the boys who rushed in breathless and ran out-happily with the piece of silver.

Mr Stevens retired recently from the Public Service. He was one of the boys of the district who walked on Saturday mornings during the nesting season, from Point Lonsdale to Queenscliff, with his weekly collection of sparrows eggs.

At that time, he lived with his parents and brother and sister (now Mrs. Wilson, of Ocean Grove), at the Point Lonsdale lighthouse, where his father was lighthouse keeper. He attended State School 3322 at the Springs.

Soon, as was the common practice, the Stevens family moved to the Cape Schank lighthouse, where Fred attended the half-time school at the Blacks Camp Junction. It was here that he was called upon to make his own way in the world.

His first job was that of temporary telegraph messenger at the Dromana Post Office. Later, having passed an examination, he was appointed permanently to the Postmaster-General's Department at Flinders.

In 1915, he resigned from the department and served for several years in the Royal Australian Navy. During this period, he saw service in the war zones of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

He was in Papua when the 1914-18 war came to a close, and remained there until 1920, when he returned to Victoria after a continuous absence of more than three years.

Two years later, this wanderer spent seven months with two other men at the Willis Island Meteorological Station. During this time, the three men lived on rations taken to the island in the steamer which landed them there, and sighted no other soul.

The year 1923 ushered in the broadcasting era. From wireless communications, Mr. Stevens moved into this new entertainment field and served at the first 2FC in Sydney, the first 3LO in Melbourne, and the first 4QG in Brisbane, where he was the chief engineer and deputy director.

Always on the look-out for new avenues of employment, in 1929, he commenced a flying trainee course, but the depression which came to a peak about 1931-32 put a temporary stop to this interest.

It was not until 1934, having obtained a commercial pilot's licence, a first-class flight radio operator's licence and a navigator's licence, that it was possible for him to take an active part in commercial flying.

He was a crew member of the first official air-mail aircraft to fly from Australia to Singapore and return.

By 1937, aviation in Australia was beginning to emerge from the infancy stage. At that time, the Civil Aviation Board of the Defence Department administered such regulations, as existed, in the interest of safe flying.

It was to this board that Mr. Stevens transferred, becoming in the process the board's first Radio Inspector.

With the creation of the new Department of Civil Aviation in 1940, this man of many interests again was appointed to the Commonwealth Public Service after an absence of 23 years.

Australia at this time was at war again and, although Mr. Stevens had been on the Reserve of Officers, RAAF, and was called up for service at the commencement of hostilities, the call-up was deferred for the time being because his services were more important in civil aviation activities.

He was, however, seconded to Qantas and sent to the United States to assist in ferrying Catalina flying boats from the factory at Santiago to Australia.

On his first flight, he was aboard the first aircraft ever to fly from Suva to Sydney.

Later, the call-up for service was effected, whereupon he was posted to Allied Air Force headquarters, as a staff officer, signals, where he remained until the end of hostilities and saw service in various part of Australia, in New Guinea, and at Morotai in the Halmaheras.

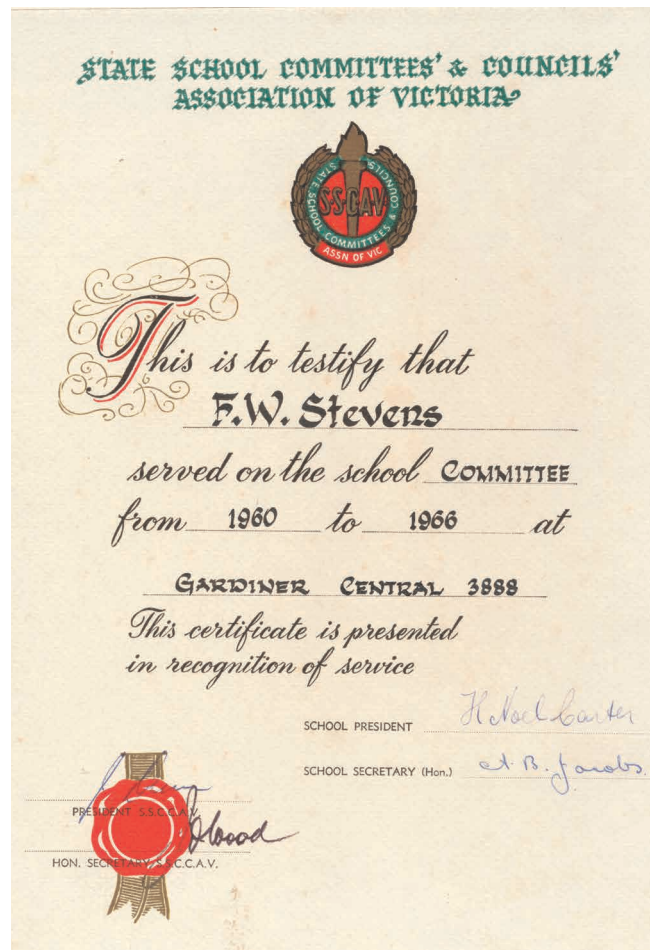
Mr. Stevens returned to civil aviation, served in Queensland and New South Wales and finally at the head office of the Department of Civil Aviation, in Melbourne.

Earlier this year, he was retired from the Public Service.

"In recognition of his service to civil aviation, the Queen, during her visit to Melbourne, appointed Mr. Stevens a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil Division).



Fred, probably at a meeting of the Gardiner Central School board, April 1966.



FM 2056

0170

N. S. W.

L. Brain

N. S. W. Head.

Dunblair Bay

"WYUNA COURT"  
4 LONGWORTH AVENUE  
POINT PIPER  
SYDNEY

7 August 1963.

Dear Fred,

Only last week I heard that you had retired from your position with D.C.A. and I write to wish you good health and peace and happiness in your retirement.

It brings back many vivid memories of your being loaned in 1929 to act as radio operator on our search flight for Anderson and Hitecock and how you installed and ~~was~~ overnight you installed a makeshift transmitter and receiver in "Atalanta" and lowered a trailing aerial by simply drilling a hole in the wooden floor. And what amazingly successful results you achieved on that search flight.

Some later when I was teaching you to fly in a "moth" and before you reached solo stage, we took off one morning and just as we were in the air I found that my cockpit was not fitted with a joystick, and how I talked you around and back to a safe landing at Eagle Farm airport without your knowing that I had no dual control!

Letter to Fred from Lester Brain.





QANTAS HOUSE  
70 HUNTER STREET  
SYDNEY

19th January, 1966

Mr. F. W. Stevens,  
2 Kyarra Road,  
GLEN IRIS SE6 VIC.

Dear Fred,

It was indeed good to hear from you, and in such a helpful way.

A few corrections are coming in for "Qantas Rising" but so far these are far less than I had anticipated.

Obtaining reasonable accuracy in a book of this kind is a colossal job.

In regard to page 263, Katherine is mentioned in the tender forms, but in actuality Daly Waters was used. I will add a line to explain this.

In regard to Coolgardie safe, you are correct here and we are making an alteration.

- 2 -

Your piece "lost and found" is an invaluable sort of piece and just what I was looking for in regard to describing DH86 operations in my next book, which will not be out for a couple of years.

I remember Bert Hussey got lost and just got out of it. Was he the pilot?

Could you name the aircraft, crew and date, and any other relevant information.

Could you also describe what wireless or D/F we used in those days.

My impression was that we used a very ineffective D/F, the name of which I forget, but no wireless communication.

All these questions will be looked up of course, but your remarks as an expert would be a great help and, of course, I would name you in the book.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

  
Hudson Fysh



## Vale Fred Stevens

Mr. Frederick William Stevens, affectionately known as Fred to all who worked with him, spent a life time in communications commencing at a very early age when assisting his father, who was a lighthouse keeper at Wilsons Promotory, to signal ships with flags and lights. In 1911 he started work as a PMG telegraphist and early in the Great War joined the Navy as a radio operator. After the war he obtained the first Australian Flight radio operators licence issued, joined Qantas and eventually became navigator and pilot. He also held a Flight Engineers licence. Tiring of the continual travel he commenced duty as station engineer at 4QG Brisbane before that station was taken over by the ABC.

During 1937, when the Civil Aviation Board was established, Fred re-entered the Commonwealth Public Service, as a radio inspector. During the early war years he was seconded to the RAAF as a signals officer and being a licensed pilot was active in liaison work between DCA and service radio stations, flying himself around in Tiger Moth and other similar aircraft. After the war years he resumed duty with the Department as Superintendent of Airways Operations, Brisbane Area, and then served in Sydney prior to promotion to the position of Superintendent of Communications, Central Office.

At the end of his long career in the various spheres of communications, Fred was awarded the MBE in the Queen's New Year honours list and received his decoration from Her Majesty in person, an event which he referred to as 'the proudest moment of his life'. Late in November 1962, Fred retired from the Department and it is now our sad duty to record his passing on the 5th October, 1966, after a short illness. To his wife and family we extend our deepest sympathy. Vale Fred Stevens.

Official obituary.



**B**URIED in Melbourne recently was Fred Stevens, one of this State's earliest notable aviators and communications experts. He partnered Lester Brain in the thrilling adventure which resulted in the finding of lost airmen Hitchcock and Anderson, was the first airmail pilot to New Guinea, a Qantas pilot, early 4QG engineer (before the ABC days), in RAAF Signals, and Superintendent of Civil Aviation Board Communications. His first exercises in signals were with flags, from his father's lighthouse at Wilson's Promontory, where he spent much of his childhood. He had a personal investiture by the Queen of the MBE, in 1963.

Brisbane Telegraph, 11 November 1966.





## A Modern Pioneer

Aviation and radio communication have meant so much to the comfort and security of the outback that we feel it is fitting to pay a tribute to one who did much for both mediums.

Fredrick William Stevens, M.B.E., died recently at his home in Victoria. The son of a lighthouse keeper, he received part of his education at the half-time school at Black's Camp Junction. His first job was as a telegraph messenger and perhaps it was from this that his interest in communications began. He enlisted in the R.A.N. in 1915 and saw service in many areas. He was in Papua when the war ended and remained there until 1920, when he returned to Victoria. Two years later he was one of three men stationed on Willis Island Met. Station. North Queensland has known the value of this particular service.

1923 saw the birth of the broadcasting era and Mr. Stevens moved from the dot-dash-dot of wireless to the new field of radio transmission. He was with the first 2FC Sydney, the first 3LO Melbourne and was Chief Engineer and Deputy Manager of the first 4QG Brisbane. Those who remember these early days of radio will recall how, when the land line for some outside broadcast broke down (and it usually did), the studio staff would keep the station open with an impromptu programme. One of the highlights was when the Engineer left his control room and came to the mike to relate his adventures on Willis Is., in the Navy or as a boy on the lighthouse. Most listeners were sorry when the normal programme resumed, the impromptu one had been so interesting. Looking for fresh fields, Mr. Stevens became interested in aviation and in 1934 obtained a commercial pilot's licence, a first class flight radio operator's licence and a navigator's licence. He was a crew member of the first official airmail to fly from Australia to Singapore and return. Later he became the first Radio Inspector of the Civil Aviation Board. Twenty-three years after he entered the public service as a messenger he returned in 1940 to the new Department of Aviation. During the second World War he saw service again with the R.A.A.F. ferrying Catalinas to Aust. and as a staff officer in Allied Headquarters. During his time with 4QG he flew with Lester Brain in search of Hitchcock and Anderson, fitting up a radio transmission set which kept the plane in constant touch with 4QG. He accompanied Brain again on the record smashing flight, for a commercial plane, from Sydney to Melbourne, in the fantastic time of 4 hours and 10 minutes, beating Keith Anderson's time by 10 minutes.

Fred Stevens retired in 1963 after a working life full of drama and adventure. He saw, and was concerned in, some of the most drastic changes in communications the world had yet seen, from Morse Code to television.

The old pioneers ventured into the unknown in bullock wagons, on horseback and in drays, facing the hardships with courage and fortitude. The modern counterparts went aloft in ridiculous contraptions which mainly proved the theory that what goes up, must come down. But they kept going, staying aloft a little longer, travelling a little faster each time, until now a doctor may reach a sick child or an injured stockman in a matter of hours. They sat for hours with headphones clamped to their head assaulting their ears with fiendish caterwauling, crackling and whistling, and counted the time well spent if they could distinguish a human voice through the din. They soldered wires, took bits out and put bits in and talked the jargon of their time, most of it already obsolete. But because of them, a woman may call for help, or a lonely child receive the companionship of vocal contact with the outside world. They had the true pioneering spirit, difficulties were overcome promptly, the impossible took a little longer.

In this tribute to Fred Stevens we honour also all those "Magnificent Men with their Flying Machines and Wireless Sets" whose contribution to the welfare of Australians can never be measured.

Bowen Hills Historical Society Bulletin, March 1967.

36-2056

ANERLEY  
264 NEW SOUTH HEAD ROAD  
DOUBLE BAY  
SYDNEY

14 Dec. 1966.

Dear Mr. Stevens,

News of Fred's death reached me from a Press clipping sent by a friend, but I was unaware of your address until advised by Hudson Dyke.

I extend to you my sincere sympathy and I shall always remember him as one of the grandest characters I have ever met.

Behind an unassuming and retiring nature he was a person of great determination, ability, high integrity, loyalty and dedication to duty. One could trust and rely on him absolutely.

I have often spoken of him and feel the richer for having known and been associated with him over years of flying together.

With cordial regards and all good wishes.

Yours sincerely  
Lester Brain.

Letter of condolence from Lester Brain to Nance.



# MR. F. W. STEVENS WAS PIONEER IN RADIO, AVIATION

**THE death occurred recently of Mr. Frederick William Stevens, MBE, son of one of Point Lonsdale's early lighthouse keepers.**

His father, Mr. George F. W. Stevens, was stationed at Point Lonsdale from 1900-03, 1910-12 and 1919-22.

During his first term as lighthouse keeper, Mr. Stevens, snr., also had charge of the post office, sharing the duties with his wife.

Later, the post office was transferred to Mr. Edward Gill's store in the shopping centre.

His eldest son, Frederick William, had his own flags and little mast when he was only a child.

He attended the Point Lonsdale State School from 1910 to 1912, and

finished his primary education at Blacks Camp State School, near Cape Schanck, where his father was stationed.

His first job was as a telegraph messenger, and from this his interest in communications began. After serving in the Navy during World War I, Mr. Stevens spent some time stationed at the Willis Island meteorological station.

With the advent of broadcasting, he worked first at 2FC Sydney, then at 3LO Melbourne and later as chief engineer and deputy manager of 4QG Brisbane.

## Aviation, Too

Mr. Stevens also became interested in aviation, and in 1934, gained his commercial pilot's licence.

He was a crew member of the first official airmail flight from Australia to Singapore.

Later he became first radio inspector of the Civil Aviation Board, and in 1940 joined the new Department of Aviation. During World War II he saw service again, ferrying Catalinas to Australia for the RAAF.

Fred Stevens retired in 1963 after a working life full of drama and adventure.

His sister, Mrs. Rubie Wilson, lives at Ocean Grove, and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Loveday Stevens, lives in Simpson Street, Point Lonsdale. Mrs. Wilson will be remembered as Miss Stevens, a school-teacher at the Point Lonsdale school for a number of years.



## Appendix 1 – Published articles written by Fred

### Life in a Lonely Lighthouse

(Brisbane *Daily Standard*, 4 September 1926)

[This article has been reconstructed with photographs that approximate the originals, which are lost.]

*The following interesting article specially written for the Standard dealing with life on a coastal lighthouse, and its intense loneliness is from the pen of Mr F. W. Stevens, chief engineer for the Queensland Radio Service, who spent many of his early years at the Clifly Island light house, Bass Strait. His present interest in wireless naturally brings home to him the tremendous change that the discoveries in radio science have made in the lives of lighthouse-keepers, and he emphasises the point in a graphic way.*

In our busy walks of life we seldom think of such things as lighthouses. Perhaps we read of them; or perhaps we go for a sea voyage and see a lighthouse as we pass along the coast. It all seems very romantic then. Perched up on a high cliff is the lighthouse, with white foam dashing high over the jagged rocks below. Close at hand are two or three dwellings and a signal station, and we may say, "Oh! how lonely it must be living there!" The lighthouse-keeper would probably retort: "Oh! fancy living in a city." Lighthouses exist at different parts along the coast the whole world over, and coasts used frequently are better equipped than others. Places like the south coast of West Australia have few lighthouses, for the reason that few ships pass along it. When a vessel leaves Albany a course is set for Capo Borda, and she travels perhaps four days without sighting land. From Adelaide to Cape York, on the other hand, a vessel hugs the coast most of the way, and is very seldom out of sight of a lighthouse. As one drops astern another is sighted ahead. Some few years ago each State had its own separate lighthouse service, but now all the lighthouses on the Australian coast are under Commonwealth control. Although this is the case, there is a subbranch in each State, and each State administers and attends to its own lights.

Periodical visits are paid to each light by a supply ship for the purpose of carrying stores and provisions. Some lighthouses are visited more frequently than others. This depends on their situation and need. For some years the little *Karuah* tended the Queensland lights, but the task grew too great for the game little vessel to manage. Today there are two vessels engaged on this work on the Queensland coast — the *Cape York* and the *Cape Leeuwin*.



*A treacherous doorstep.— Landing at and leaving lighthouses is often a dangerous proceeding. The photo shows the lowering of a boat into the rough seas at Clifly Island.*

### Lights that differ

The lights on the Queensland coast total twice as many as are on the coast of Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania combined, and of the 177 different lights on the Australian coast it is interesting to note that not two are alike. To the casual passenger they may appear alike, but it is by means of different duration of flash and eclipse that the mariner distinguishes them. Some are red, some white, some fixed, and some flashing. One may show a flash of six seconds and an eclipse of three seconds, another may show three flashes of a second's duration, with an eclipse of 10 seconds, and so on. There is a method in this apparent confusion. Practically the whole of the lighthouses on the Australian coast are built on dry land. In other parts of the world they are often to be seen on a rock away from the coast, with the base of the tower actually in the water. Rough weather makes it impossible for a boat to approach the tower, and communication with the outside world is entirely cut off.

### Real loneliness

Beachy Head, on the south coast of England, has a lighthouse which stands out in the sea. It is visible to passengers on vessels trading out of London, and may be seen within a few hours of leaving the mouth of the River Thames. Another isolated light is that on Robin's Reef, which guides the shipping of the world into New York harbor. This light is so isolated and desolate that when the keeper died away back in 1887 it was impossible to find a man to carry on there. The wife of the keeper who had died, a Mrs Walker, decided to remain at the post which death had forced her husband to abandon. Mrs Walker, with her two children,







*The Lighthouse at Clifly Island, typical of Australia's coastal beacons.*



*Looking down from the lighthouse on Watchman Island, Hauraki Gulf, New Zealand.*

remained, and for 35 years she kept the Robin's Reef light burning.

The life of the lightkeeper varies considerably with the situation of the lighthouse. In one case the lighthouse may be close to a town, and it is then that the keepers enjoy most of the privileges of ordinary citizens. The children can go to school and their mothers may enjoy a night at the pictures occasionally. It is at the "outside" lighthouses that the scene changes. Little communities consisting of two or three families live at those isolated lighthouses. Week in, week out, perhaps for three whole years these Robinson Crusoes live on a tiny island, or on a projection or land miles from civilisation.

The keepers tend the light which guides the mariner on his way. Each night at sundown the guiding beacon sends out its warning, which continues till the sun again lights the sky. Most lighthouses have three keep-



#### *Overhauling and cleaning*

*The unwatched light on Canoe Rock; Hauraki Gulf.*

ers and the 24 hours are split into different watches. The head keeper generally keeps a look out from eight to noon and from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. The remaining 16 hours are split between the two other keepers and their shifts alternate each week.

#### *Plenty of work*

It is surprising what a lot can be found to occupy the time of the 'keepers and although they keep a watch for eight hours a day, almost every morning is spent on special work. The houses, tower, flag staff, lookout house, and stores have to be painted. The signal flags have to be mended, and gear overhauled. The apparatus in the lighthouse has to be kept in the utmost state of perfection and the magnifying prisms and reflectors must be spotlessly clean. The steps in the high lighthouse are always scrubbed and the lookout house is spotlessly clean.

There are fish to be caught, as it is weeks, sometimes, between the visits of the supply ship with fresh meat. The stray goats must be found or there will be no milk, the wood must be carted in and cut, and the garden must be cared for or there will be no vegetables. The day the supply ship arrives is the greatest day of all. On the Victorian coast this is called "Loch" day. The supply ship, *Lady Loch*, calls at most of the lighthouses once every three months. Stores, provisions, coal and oil are brought by this vessel. It means a few days hard work for the men and older boys of the families, but for the younger children it is a time of joy. It means getting up early, even before daylight, and the goats are milked by the aid of a hurricane lamp; breakfast is served, and away down the hill to the landing scamper the youngsters. The *Lady Loch* has perhaps left Melbourne the morning before and her first port of call will be Queenscliff, to pick up a family which is going to one of the outside lighthous-



*A general view of Cliffy Island, showing lighthouse and quarters.*

es. The Port Phillip Heads are cleared about noon, and by 2 o'clock Cape Schanck is passed. The blue ensign is dipped by both ship and signal station as the *Lady Loch* plugs into the steady roll of Bass Strait. By 3 a.m. the Wilson's Promontory light is visible and Morse lamps exchange signals. The captain advises that he will send the first boat ashore at 6 a.m. Steam has been raised on the donkey engine the night before and the fires are banked.

### *Unloading*

All hands are called at 5 a.m., and soon everything is in readiness. Soon the *Lady Loch* steams from Waterloo Bay, where she had been at anchor since she arrived, into the little cove which shelters the landing. The anchor chain rattles out, and a surf boat is lowered and loaded with provisions, a big bag of mail, and papers. Some distance from the shore an anchor is dropped from the surf boat, and a line attached to the stern keeps the boat off the rocks while unloading is proceeding. A large crane swings out from the landing with a huge basket attached to the wire rope, and is lowered into the boat. The wife of a new keeper is placed in the basket with her baby, a signal is made, the donkey engine puffs, and away up into midair swings the basket with its human freight. Gradually the crane swings round, and the basket is lowered on the rocks. Lift after lift, first stores, then sacks of coal, and oil for the light, and more stores until at last all is landed. By dinner time the *Lady Loch* is on her way to Cliffy Island, and the other eastern lighthouses. So the life on a lighthouse goes on, and there is little time to worry about isolation.

### *Wireless a boon*

The wings of science have brought many changes to the lives of all men, but it is wireless telephony which has perhaps brought the most pleasure. Several light-keepers have their own receiving sets, and enjoy the programmes from the different broadcasting stations.

They can also hear the latest news, and hear the results of the Melbourne Cup a few seconds after it has been run, but they are unable to communicate with the outside world. A few years ago a fire broke out on Cliffy Island, some 20 miles from the coast. A lady was badly burned, and it was many hours before Morse lamp communication with Wilson's Promontory brought medical aid. It is now said that the Commonwealth lighthouse service has decided to supply small transmitting sets to some of the more isolated stations, and that a commencement will be made with Cliffy Island, Deal Island, and Wilson's Promontory, on the Victorian coast. Messages to and from the two islands will be handled by Wilson's Promontory, which is connected through Foster, in Gippsland, with Melbourne by means of telephone. Three of the photos reproduced were taken at the barren little Cliffy Island, which is well worthy of its name.

### **Let's Put the Clock Back**

*(Aviation Institute Review June 1959, 7-9)*

It seems not so long ago that we bought our kerosene in bottles or in a four-gallon tin, trimmed the old buggy lamps, harnessed the horse and took the girl friend to a country dance. It is now the jet age when thousands of gallons of kerosene are pumped into an aircraft and we are carried across the world in a matter of hours.

In this fast moving jet age now upon us in these times of large streamlined aircraft perhaps we are inclined too quickly to forget that but a few short years have passed since the aircraft that blazed our overseas trail, Brisbane to Singapore and return, occupied four days in each direction. This job will soon be done by Boeing 707s almost between sunrise and sunset.

It was on the morning of Christmas Day, December 25, 1934, that the first Australian crew left Brisbane to survey the Brisbane-Singapore route. It was on February 22, 1935, that the first of the aircraft built specially for the air-mail route to Singapore, a DH86, VH-USF, set out from Darwin on the first official service. This aircraft arrived back in Darwin with the first official inward mail carried by Australian aircraft and Australian crew on February 26, 1935.

The DH86, equipped with four 6-cylinder inverted Gypsy engines and with a seating capacity of 10 and sometimes a load capacity of one or two passengers and a crew of 2 has been spoken of as a wood and wire aeroplane; that, putting it mildly, is a libel. The DH86 had its shortcomings but what aeroplane does not? Perhaps the DH86 was a little temperamental at





take-off but once off the ground she could be flown in anything but severe turbulence with two fingers on the 'stick'. She would fly from Darwin to Koepang across the Timor Sea on little more fuel than now needed to get a large jet into the air. Five DH86s, VH-USC, VH-USD, VH-USF, VH-USE and VH-UUA, carried mail and passengers on our overseas airmail route between Brisbane and Singapore over several years and never harmed a soul. In fair weather and foul, through a genuine cyclone over the Timor Sea indeed, through the dry heat of western Queensland and the rains of the tropics; in and out of small fields such as Roma, Winton, Brunette Downs and Newcastle Waters then were [sic]; without radio navigational aids and very little in the way of communications facilities; with crews that worked up to 16 or more hours per day four days in a row; with all this and more the DH86 and those that flew and maintained them laid the foundation stones upon which the jet age aeroplane of today will operate.

There were good days with the bad; there was some fun with the hard work. Let us, therefore, look back on a flight from Brisbane to Singapore remembering however that there were no automatic pilots; there were no hosties to serve meals and indeed sometimes there was little in the way of wholesome meals; there were all too often no ground crews to handle mail and baggage; there were no booking agents at some of the smaller stopping places and sometimes the nearest maintenance engineer was a thousand miles or more away. Remember too that although two pilots' licences, a navigator's licence and a 1st Class Flight Radio Operator's and a Division "X" Radio licence must be aboard, these must necessarily be held within a total crew of two; flight crews were of necessity multi qualified.

On our sample flight we are out of bed around 3.30 a.m. in time to collect the ship's papers at the office, call at the GPO for outgoing mail, carefully supervise the loading of the aircraft with special emphasis on balance, collect passengers' tickets, ensure that a few spare newspapers for helpful agents along the way are aboard, and do the other hundred and one things necessary for a 6 a.m. departure. The weather is fine. The forecast is for strong south easterlies; the found winds are strong north westerlies but we guessed they would be and had planned accordingly. After a call at Roma for fuel and a cup of tea with egg sandwiches on we go to Charleville where steak and eggs are awaiting us for lunch on the aerodrome.

The connecting service from Cootamundra with the Sydney & Melbourne mail is late so we amuse

ourselves by scraping mud from the wheels and spats which mud has resulted from local unseasonable rain. In due course we depart some two hours late because of the late arrival of the connecting service; we send feathers flying as we fly through kite hawks riding the updraughts of western Queensland. At Blackall, our next port of call to put down a passenger, the agent, a local garage man, is not at the aerodrome. Someone fires a Verey signal hoping the agent will see it and hasten. The Verey signal sets the grass afire so we hasten instead! Longreach for afternoon tea but we must first "shoot up" the aerodrome in the hope of hunting a mob of goats clear of the runway. Onward to Winton and the sun is setting as we leave there on the last leg of the day to Cloncurry. The 'Curry airway rotating light soon comes up ahead. After seeing the passengers into cars (or perhaps one car that makes two or three trips to town), ensuring that the aircraft is secured and the mail locked away we are free for a late dinner and a sleep.

Next morning we are astir about 4 am and, after a cup of tea and toast in the hotel kitchen, the local mail is collected from a very sleepy boy at the Post Office. It is not yet light as we leave Cloncurry for Mt Isa and then Camooweal for breakfast. Daylight soon comes in and we can see the smoke stack of the Mt Isa mine – a useful navigational aid when approaching from the east. This week we drop mail and freight at Anthony's Lagoon; the next service will do this at Alexandria Station. On this occasion we have a car axle to drop. We hear later that it went straight in and that it was recovered only after three days' hard digging. Onward again; Brunette Downs for morning tea, thence Newcastle Waters and so to Daly Waters for lunch. Between Daly Waters and Darwin we spy Doctor Fenton in his Moth; we fly close by and exchange greetings by sign language and give the good Doctor a taste of our slipstream – very foolish but good fun.

At Darwin there is a maintenance crew so the mail is moved to the Post Office while the aircraft is inspected. During the evening we visit the Met man and his wife and enjoy recorded music and a yarn; we also discuss tomorrow's weather which is not particularly promising. At 3 a.m. we are astir and after a boiled egg and tea we call at the Post Office for a truck load of mail. Loading, Customs clearances etc. completed we take off into darkness and immediately leave behind "sunny Australia". We pass Cape Fourcroy on DR and set course for Koepang heading into heavy rain and clouds down on the waves. Through a break in the low clouds we take a drift sight and lay off 5 more degrees of drift. Onward we plod with an eye on



the clock; it is soon time to come down to wave tops and watch for the coast ahead. Ah! there is the coast; pull up, cross the Island and feel our way down the other side, to breakfast and re-fuel. We are greeted by the usual sightseers – shaggy men on shaggy Timor ponies; men with knives in their belts and men whose thoughts would be difficult to imagine.

In the air again, onward over Sumba Island and Waingapoe; onward round the corner of Sumbawa to a landing at Rambang on Lombok Island where the monkeys climb on the fence posts surrounding the aerodrome and chatter and shake their fists at us as we taxi in. The run from Rambang to Surabaya is short; a mere couple of hours in the air and we are again soon free to enjoy a night's rest. We have lost two and a bit hours today due to 'change of time' so when we turn in at 9 pm at Surabaya the clocks in Darwin show something after 11 pm; we have, therefore been alert for a total of 20 hours.

Next morning we are called soon after 3 a.m. and find in the hotel dining room a menu that is difficult to describe; there are eggs cooked in about twenty different ways, cold meat, hot meat, curry and stew. We have an omelette and coffee.

Will we clear those bamboos at the end of the field? Yes, we make it with the second dickie almost forcing the throttles through the windscreen. On again past Samarang with myriads of fishing boats in the bay as the first light breaks through thunder clouds to the east. On past Cheribon; on over the canals; on over paddy fields and timber forests; on past tiny villages built in extinct volcano craters high in the mountains; on across Java to Batavia that is now Djakarta for breakfast and to fill our tanks to capacity for the long haul to Singapore. Towering woolpacks through the valleys of which we twist and turn trying to remain VFR. Finally we bore into heavy rain with lightning flashes on all sides. Two pairs of eyes are glued to the bank and turn indicator and the rev. counter. We pass Muntok on Babka Island; we hope we do anyway as the clock says we should. The turbulence has eased so it seems that we are out over the water again. A break ahead; the rain eases to a fine drizzle. Ah, yes, there is Singapore on track on time. Soon we can relax to the strains of a Viennese waltz played by an Austrian band, enjoy a dinner prepared by a Swiss chef and served by a Malayan boy on English china, refreshed in the meantime by a haircut and shampoo by a Japanese barber followed by Scotch and soda. Let us enjoy this relaxation for we must soon retrace our steps to Brisbane.

## The "Rip"

(*Aviation Institute Review* September 1965, 11–13)

The story of the Rip, that narrow turbulent treacherous and sometimes death-dealing whirlpool that connects Port Phillip Bay with the ocean outside, began for the white man 163 years ago. However, before the white man came and perhaps before aborigines hunted along its shores, Port Phillip Bay as we know it today might have been a lake separated at its southern extremity from the ocean by a sandstone barrier.

How, when or why the lake, if indeed it did exist, became a bay is something for the scientist to ponder. It is interesting to note, nevertheless, that some sandstone formations do change in shape and size within a lifetime. It is conceivable therefore that a sandstone barrier that once might have existed between Port Phillip Heads could have been worn away as the seas and the centuries rolled by and given us the "Rip" as we know it today.

Towards the end of 1801, HMS *Lady Nelson* under the command of Lt. Grant had been sent to Australia on an exploratory and surveying mission. Lt. Grant, en route to Port Jackson, sighted and named Portland Bay, Cape Otway and Cape Schanck but he did not realize that Port Phillip Bay existed. Later, *Lady Nelson* now under the command of Lt. Murray returned westward and, having been forced to seek shelter, anchored in Western Port Bay. When the weather moderated, Murray sent his Mate, Mr Bowen, in a whaleboat to investigate the coast between Cape Schanck and Cape Otway.

It was on February 1, 1802, that Mr Bowen discovered and sailed through the Rip and, upon returning to his ship, reported that "a noble sheet of water" existed inside the entrance. Lt. Murray soon got under way and, on February 15, 1802, brought the first sailing vessel through the rip into Port Phillip Bay. Two months later the great navigator Matthew Flinders also entered the Bay but it was not until October 9, 1803, that the Collins colonising expedition with 300 convicts anchored off Sorrento to be. Apparently Collins did not appreciate the sand dunes nor the lack of fresh water as he soon took his convicts to Van Diemen's Land.

During the short Collins visit some of his convicts escaped. One returned, two were never heard of again, but the fourth, William Buckley, re-appeared 32 years later. We shall meet Mr Buckley again later in this story.

Little was done to establish a settlement on the shores of Port Phillip Bay for some years. However, John





Batman, an adventurous young man of Van Diemen's Land across Bass Strait, disregarding all opposition to settlement by the Port Jackson government, on May 29, 1835, passed through the Rip en route to his "place for a village". Thus Port Phillip Heads slowly gained recognition and the flow of shipping through the Rip began.

Of Point Lonsdale to the west of the Rip and Point Nepean to the east, the latter is of little consequence in this story. Point Lonsdale on the other hand has an interesting history but to put it in its right perspective, Queenscliff, three miles to the north, must first be introduced.

Queenscliff, although not yet carrying that name, was conceived in 1842. In that year, during a survey of Port Phillip Bay by Captain Hobson (after who Hobson's Bay is named) in HMS *Rattlesnake*, a Master Gunner by name Shortland drew attention to a prominent headland. Perhaps out of respect for the Master Gunner, or perhaps because there was no other suitable name readily available, this headland and the peninsula that adjoined it were given the name "Shortland's Bluff." This name was carried forward to the first settlement in the area.

But eight years were to pass before settlement commenced. In 1850 a Mr James Stephens obtained a Government lease of Shortland's Bluff and, having built himself a house there, moved in with his wife and mother. However, isolation and monotony soon drove this family away and for a time the holding was left in the hands of a stockman who provided fresh meat to passing sailing ships.

In September 1851, a family named Dod, having arrived at Geelong from England in the clipper ship *Statesman*, met Mr Stephens and soon negotiated a transfer of the Shortland's Bluff Lease. Two days were spent in cutting a track from Geelong to the property 20 miles away and this suggests that Stephens, when he built his house, brought the material by sea and not overland from Geelong.

By this time it was approaching 18 years since Batman chose his "place for a village". In the meantime the population of Melbourne, and Geelong, was growing apace and soon a demand arose for a seaside resort. In 1852 Shortland's Bluff was selected as a suitable site. It was surveyed, cut up, sold to willing buyers many from the goldfields with funds to spare, and re-named *Queenscliff* after Queen Victoria. Soon Cobb and Co. coaches and the first of the "Bay" steamers were bringing holiday makers to the seaside.

Mr Dod, the first permanent settler at Queenscliff, became the first Postmaster there in 1854. A son followed in his footsteps and held the joint position of Postmaster and Signals Master until 1884. Several headstones in the Point Lonsdale cemetery carry the name of Dod but these seem to be the only memorials to the family that took the first hand in shaping the destiny of one of our popular seaside areas.

Although settlement did not get under way until 1852, a lighthouse was built at Shortland's Bluff in 1842. This was a wooden structure with an oil-burning lamp. With the introduction of a second lighthouse to give a lead through the Rip, the older light became known as the "lower" light while the new one took on the designation "higher" light.

An adequate supply of fresh water proved to be a problem during the early development of Queenscliff, and the surrounding district. At first, wooden barrels sunk in the earth near The Springs midway between Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale were used to collect seepage water. It was not until 1889 that the first public-water supply was laid down.

Fishing and boat-building both were developed as organised industries at Queenscliff. For a time the crayfish and barracouta, caught outside the Rip, were sent to the Melbourne market by sea. The opening of the Queenscliff to Geelong railway on February 21, 1878, was a great event for it enabled the fishermen to more quickly get their catches to market, and eliminated much of the Cobb and Co. coach traffic. It is helped to increase the tourist trade which in turn helped to more quickly develop Queenscliff and district.

While Queenscliff is developing as a seaside resort, basking in the sunshine or shivering in the southerly gales, we must take a closer look at Point Lonsdale. There is little doubt that William Buckley, the convict who escaped near Sorrento in 1803 and who had lived with the aborigines in the meantime and in doing so had travelled round the Bay, was the first white "resident" at Point Lonsdale. Tradition says that he lived in "Buckley's Cave" in the cliff beneath the site of the present Lighthouse until found by John Batman when buying land from the natives in 1835.

Between 1854 and 1863 an old mariner, Captain Preston, with the safety of shipping in mind, lived with his daughter in a tent at Point Lonsdale and nightly through those lonely nine years fixed to the mast of his self-built signal station a little lamp that burnt colza oil. Captain Preston's self-imposed task ended when the old original wooden lighthouse was moved from Queenscliff and erected at a point some



500 yards west of the site of the present lighthouse. This old light functioned for thirty-nine years being exhibited for the last time on the evening of March 19, 1902. It was not demolished until 1912 when it was found that swarms of bees had made it their home. The existing lighthouse functioned for the first time at sunset on March 20, 1902.

Point Lonsdale, too, soon began to attract holiday makers. As the years rolled by, "Bay" steamers including the *Lady Bird*, *Williams*, *Ozone*, *Hygeia* and *Weeroona* to name but a few, carried their human freight to Queenscliff, whence those who wished to do so, travelled to Point Lonsdale in four-, and sometimes six-in-hand horse-drawn drags [correct] and in cabs.

The first boarding house which opened at Point Lonsdale in 1885 occupied the present site of "The Terminus". "Cottee's Coffee Palace" was the forerunner of the present "Kora Weari", while "Merrilyn" opened early in 1900.

The first shop, that sold afternoon teas, and halfpenny bars of chocolate, opened in early 1900s. This shop with few changes can be seen today near the entrance to the lighthouse reserve. Indeed, apart from the addition of a few amenities such as running water, hot showers and TV, some of the first guest houses have changed but little during the passing years. Some of these have been handed on from father to son.

Between 1901 and 1910 the head lighthouse keeper was also the Point Lonsdale Postmaster. He handled the mail and sold stamps through a window of a converted bedroom in his house which is there today, second from the ramp that leads to the lighthouse. In April 1910 the Post Office services were handed over to a Mr Gill who opened an office in his residence at a more central position. This service was handed over from father to daughter but still is conducted in the same building.

A chapter in the history of ship to shore communication rightly belongs to Point Lonsdale.

On the occasion of the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to open the first Federal Parliament in the Melbourne Exhibition Building on May 9, 1901, the Royal Yacht *Ophir* that carried their Royal Highnesses was fitted with one of the first wireless installations. An experimental station was installed ashore, in the original signal station at Point Lonsdale, and, operated by Mr Jenv[e]y, a Post Office Engineer, established the first Australian ship-to-shore wireless link. Later in 1906, the first Victorian Marconi wireless station to operate officially was established at The Springs, midway between Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff.

However, it was not until the tragic iceberg collision of the *Titanic* in the Atlantic Ocean with the loss of 1503 lives on April 14, 1912, that ship-borne wireless became commonplace.

Until about 1912, the international code of flag signals was the only means of usual communication between ships at sea and the shore. As this system depended upon recognition of specific flags by their shapes and colours, the system was not only slow but it was not effective at night nor during periods of poor visibility. In 1912 the Morse lamp, which was first used on the Australian coast between the steamer *Marloo* and Wilsons Promontory a year earlier, came steadily into use. Saturday evenings were always busy at Point Lonsdale when Melbourne football scores were transmitted to passing ships and to the pilot steamer.

A Captain Tobin, who began operating in a private capacity in November 1838, is credited with being the first sea pilot at Port Phillip Heads. The first licensed pilot was Henry Sutton, whose certificate was dated November 1st, 1839.

Life for the early pilots was one of hardship and endurance. The vessels which they used, mere whale-boats, and after about 1854 small schooners, were difficult to handle in rough weather, and the tents which housed the pilots when on shore were certainly not designed for comfortable living. However, in 1901 the first pilot steamer *Victoria* came into service. With powered vessels came easier and safer transferring of today as well as more comfortable ship-board conditions.

The pride of Port Phillip sea pilots is the *Wyuna*, a twin-screw diesel electric ship especially designed for use at the Heads. Although *Wyuna* has a maximum endurance of twelve months in service, her usual time on station is six months. When transferred to Melbourne for overhaul her duties are performed by the relief vessel *Akuna* ex HMAS *Gladstone*.

As the treacherous waters of the Rip began to inflict their toll on early shipping the need was soon felt for a sea-rescue service. In 1865 the first lifeboat at the Heads was established at Queenscliff. Following the building of a pier at Point Lonsdale, a lifeboat was stationed there also. Then, as today, fishermen made up the life boat crews. It was not until 1926 that a motor lifeboat was brought into use at Queenscliff. Today, one lifeboat still remains, resting on a slipway at Queenscliff and always ready for immediate use.

Shipwrecks in and near the Rip have been many and various. They have included small ketches and schooners, full-rigged ships, barques, steamers, and at





least one overseas Royal Mail liner. The total number of wrecks in this area is probably now more than fifty, in addition to which there have been perhaps another fifty instances of collisions, stranding, re-floating, and similar mishaps without the complete loss of the vessels concerned.

Some wrecks have resulted from poor seamanship and perhaps carelessness, while some have resulted from bad luck, adverse weather or lack of local knowledge, but the "Rip" itself must take the blame for many misfortunes.

The Rip has always been a hazard to vessels entering and leaving Port Phillip Bay due largely to the ebb tide surging out through the narrow bay entrance and boiling up over a rocky submarine platform between the Heads with an effect similar to rapids in a river. When this torrent meets with heavy seas one of the world's greatest hazards to marine navigation is created.

Today the dangers of the Rip have been steadily reduced. The state of the tide is continually transmitted from Point Lonsdale by the use of canvas shapes or coloured lights. Blasting has gradually increased the maximum depth of water at the Rip since 1881 from 28 feet to 43. But the fury of the Rip remains undaunted, and the spectacle of the ebb tide is no less awe-inspiring now than it was to the first white visitors.

### **"The discoverer of Gippsland" – Angus McMillan**

(RACV touring article 1965)

It was in the year 1810 that, on the Isle of Skye, Angus McMillan was born. At the age of 27 (1837) he migrated to Australia. Already experienced in frugal living, hard work and good farming he started in Australia with a suitable background. He soon found employment as overseer with Macalister, an established landowner in the Picton district of New South Wales.

Macalister, seeing an adventurous trait in McMillan's character, sent him in 1839 to explore southern and western New South Wales for grazing land, and to find cattle routes over the ranges. While preparing for this expedition McMillan made friends with Jimmy Gibber the chief of the Maneroo (now Monaro) native tribe. Listening to elders of the tribe talk at their camp fires one night, McMillan heard the words "*cabone benel*" repeated many times. Gibber managed to translate these words as meaning "large plains". These large plains were supposed to exist towards the south-west. McMillan forthwith decided to trek towards these "large plains" but was immediately faced with

a problem. The natives, that he wished to accompany him, were terrified of the southern tribes. Finally Jimmy Gibber and McMillan set out on horseback, with rations for six weeks. But Gibber refused to proceed further than Mt McLeod. This, however, served McMillan's purpose as, from the top of the peak, he saw the plains country of which the natives had spoken.

Upon reporting back to Macalister, the latter agreed to finance a further expedition. A forward base was established at Ensay (then Numbla Munjie) close to what is now the Omeo Highway. On January 11th, 1840, McMillan commenced the expedition with a party including 3 other white men, the chief of the Theddor tribe Cabone (Big) Jimmie and a native boy "Friday".

The first set-back was the discovery, soon after the expedition started, that due to heat much of their salt beef was spoiled. However, they pressed on along the course of the Tambo River. They crossed many creeks, passed through tangled scrub and eventually reached the wide expanse of the lower Tambo River, and still later the banks of a vast lake which formed part of the Gippsland Lakes as known today. At this time McMillan made an interesting and prophetic statement: "If there is a good entrance to the lakes steamboats will be plying on it before this generation passes away." Steamboats did later ply on the lakes. Steamers including the *Despatch* (wrecked at Lakes Entrance), *Wyrallah* (sunk in collision with *Dilkera* at Port Phillip Heads) and *Queenscliffe* (later used on the New Guinea coast) all traded regularly between Melbourne and Gippsland Lakes ports until railway and roads took over.

This expedition returned to Numbla Munjie to a wild welcome on January 27th. Shortage of food, as indicated by one of McMillan's journal entries, cut the expedition to a shorter period than intended. The entry, brief but to the point, reads "January 24th. Ate after natives had cooked kookaburra and porcupine."

McMillan's report to Macarthur was also to the point; it read: "Land is rich, climate good, nature has been kind."

Later expeditions into Gippsland were led by McMillan. On February 12th, 1841, Port Albert was reached. From this time onward Gippsland grew rapidly with settlers flowing in both from the Maneroo Country and via Port Albert.

There is a little recorded about McMillan between 1841 and 1860. He settled to station life at Bushy Park (north of Maffra). He pioneered the cattle trade between Port Albert and Hobart Town and took an



active interest in community affairs. In 1864 he led an expedition to open tracks in the mountain areas around Dargo, Omeo and Matlock. Angus McMillan died on May 18 1865 as a result of a packhorse falling on him. He was buried in the Sale Cemetery on May 20, 1865.

## Port Fairy

(RACV touring article 1965)

On April 25, 1810, one Captain James Wishart in command of the whaling cutter *Fairy* was skirting the western coast of Victoria seeking shelter and a place to rest his crew. Finding a small bay with a river beyond, Captain Wishart sailed into the calm waters offering. The prospect as he saw it so delighted him that he named the place *Fairy* after his cutter but prefixing this with the impressive word “Port”; thus, Port Fairy was born.

In 1855 Surveyor Wedge visited Port Fairy on behalf of the New South Wales Government. Wedge reported favourably to the extent that a Sydney solicitor took up land there and became the virtual owner of the new port and its surroundings. Wedge apparently was not impressed by the name of the place and changed it to “Belfast” after his birthplace. Some years later, by Act of Parliament, the name “Port Fairy” was again applied and so it remains today.

Whales abounded in the area and whaling crews came from Van Diemen’s Land and from Sydney. A whaling station was established on Griffiths Island at the mouth of the river which was now named Moyne.

A village soon developed around the site of Port Fairy, and bullock waggons lumbered into town carrying wool and produce for shipment overseas. At one stage immigrant barracks were built to house new settlers arriving direct from London until they could be drafted up-country or absorbed into local enterprise.

During earlier years various wrecks have occurred at and near Port Fairy. Most of the wrecks occurred during the era of sail, when vessels caught at bay anchorages were unable to reach the open sea during storms. One of the first of these wrecks, that of the *Thistle*, occurred in 1838. The vessel had been used by the Henty Brothers in 1835 when they founded Portland. A few other wrecks were *Dusty Killer* (1841), *Socrates* (1843), *Lydia* (1847), *Sarah Lousia* and *Lady Pelham* (1849), *Swift* (1855) and *Water Lilly* (1866). In more recent times the steamer *Casino*, which traded between Melbourne and Western District ports for many years, was wrecked at Port Fairy in 1952 with the loss of several lives.

A squat lighthouse, rough stone cottages, the Customs House, an old fortress gun, and the signal station are all relics of Port Fairy’s bustling past. These relics point back to the days when, for a time, Port Fairy was the busiest Australian port outside Sydney. Now the town is more a quiet retreat for settlers in north-western Victoria and for the itinerant tourist.

Fishing is perhaps one of its main attractions, although its wide, clean beaches and the River Hoyne offer considerable interest. There are fish to be caught in the quiet waters of the Hoyne, from the Craggs and the Seven Mile Rocks, from the beaches, and from the open sea beyond.

The population of Port Fairy is about 2,600, any one of whom may claim for their town twenty-five years more history than that of Melbourne.

## The Maranoa Gardens

(RACV touring article 1965)

A lovely corner of native Australia, the Maranoa Gardens are situated in the Melbourne suburb of Balwyn, only seven miles from the city, and are easily reached by tram or car.

Within the gardens is a magnificent collection of nearly 2,000 Australian trees, shrubs and plants. The total of 1,500 different varieties represents every State in Australia and there are some plants in bloom during each month of the year.

Adjoining the Gardens is Beckett Park, the highest point (440 feet) in metropolitan Melbourne. The park contains a lookout tower, a war memorial and a playground for children.

Both Maranoa Gardens and Beckett Park are maintained by the Camberwell City Council for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. They are located only a few blocks along Whitehorse Road, east of the Balwyn Shopping Centre. Cars can enter the parking area in Beckett Park via Parring Road, while a footway leads in from Kireep Road, through memorial gates.

The history of Maranoa goes back to 1904 when Mr J. M. Watson bought an area of three and a half acres for a private garden. He planted many native trees and shrubs and named the place *Maranoa*.

In 1922 the Camberwell Council acquired the area and continued the planting, but gradually removed all plants that were not native to Australia. Soon afterwards a committee of residents was formed to help the council and the curator at that time, Mr J. McGuire, in the specialized development of Maranoa Gardens and Beckett Park.





Maranoa was formally opened to the public in September 1926, and the late Mr F. Chapman was appointed chairman of the Consulting Committee. The keen interest and efforts of this gentleman resulted in the native plantings expanding rapidly. The attractive gates at the entrance to the gardens in Kireep Road were built as a memorial to Hr. Chapman, and opened in April, 1948. The efforts of various other people with botanical interests have also helped to build Maranoa.

In 1962 the size of the gardens was doubled by assigning three and a half acres of land from Beckett Park. The new section was opened by the Lieutenant Governor of Victoria, Sir Edmund Herring, on October 20th of that year, and to mark the occasion he planted a variegated *Tristania*, a rare variety of Queensland Brush Box. This tree, which can be seen near the eastern entrance to the gardens, is identified by a plaque.

The Maranoa Gardens are open morning and afternoon on week-days until 4.15 p.m., and from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays. Admittance is free.

### Port Phillip Heads – Part 1: The First Navigators Enter Port Phillip

(RACV touring article 1965)

At one time, perhaps before aborigines hunted along its shores, the expanse of water known today as Port Phillip Bay might not have been connected to the sea by a narrow channel. The bay, it is thought, might have been a lake separated from the sea by a sandstone barrier across its southern extremity.

How, when or why this lake, if indeed it did exist as such, became a bay is something for the scientist to ponder. It is interesting to note, nevertheless, that sandstone formations at the Heads do change in shape and size within a lifetime, and a sandstone barrier that once might have existed between Port Phillip Heads could well have been worn away as the seas and the centuries rolled by.

The story of white visitors on the shores and headlands of Port Phillip Bay begins on February 1st, 1802, when the Mate of the *Lady Nelson*, then sheltering at anchor in Western Port Bay, sailed a ship's boat through the Heads and proved, as he reported, that "a noble sheet of water" existed. Upon his reporting back to the commanding officer, Lieutenant Murray, the *Lady Nelson* was soon under sail and entered Port Phillip Bay on February 15th, anchoring in the sheltered waters close to the spot that was to become known as Sorrento.

On April 27, 1802, Port Phillip Bay was visited by the great navigator Matthew Flinders, who passed through the Heads in the *Investigator*. Still later, on October 9, 1803, the Collins colonising expedition from England, with its 300 convicts, entered the bay and anchored also near the place that was to become Sorrento. However, Collins was not impressed by the 'new land' and soon departed for Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania.

During the short Collins visit four convicts escaped into the unknown country. One voluntarily rejoined his floating prison and two were never heard of again. The fourth, William Buckley, having become friendly with the natives in the meantime, reappeared thirty-two years later on the other side of Port Phillip Bay.

The Sydney government opposed any settlement at Port Phillip. Perhaps this was due to Collins' unfavourable impression of the sand dunes in the Sorrento area, or perhaps it was nothing more than jealousy on the part of the government. However, John Batman of Van Diemen's Land, after waiting seven years for official sanction to move to Port Phillip, finally disregarded all opposition, and on May 29, 1835, paused through the Heads en route to his "place for a village".

Thus Port Phillip Heads gained recognition and the flow of shipping through the ever treacherous 'Rip' between these Heads began.

Of Point Lonsdale to the west, and Point Nepean to the east, the latter is of little consequence in the early history of shipping and white settlement. Except that it has been the graveyard of several ships attempting to negotiate the Rip, the story of Point Nepean with its defence installations and quarantine station is not of great interest. Certainly the early Port Medical Officers, using whaleboats, performed their shipping quarantine duties from a base at Point Nepean, but those days have long since passed.

Point Lonsdale on the other hand has an interesting history for by 1852 land was being sold in the boom holiday resort of Queenscliff, three miles to the north.

### Port Phillip Heads – Part 2: Queenscliff Is Settled

(RACV touring article 1965)

The scene reopens in 1842, forty years after the first entry through the Heads by a sailing vessel. It was during a survey of Port Phillip Bay by HMS *Rattlesnake* in 1842 that Shortland, a master gunner, drew attention to a prominent headland on the south-western shoreline. Perhaps out of respect for the master gunner, or perhaps because there was no other name



readily available, this headland and the peninsula that adjoined it were given the name “Shortland’s Bluff”. This name was carried forward to the first settlement in the area, which later became Queenscliff.

Eight years were to pass before settlement commenced. In 1850 James Stephens obtained a Government lease of the peninsula, building a house there and moving in with his wife and mother. These people were the first settlers. However, monotony and isolation soon drove the Stephens family away, and for a time the holding was left in the hands of a stockman.

In September 1851 a family named Dod, having arrived at Geelong from England in the clipper ship *Statesman*, met Mr Stephens and soon negotiated a take-over of the Shortland’s Bluff lease. Two days were spent in cutting a track from Geelong to the Shortland’s Bluff property and this suggests that Stephens must have brought the material for his house by sea, probably from Melbourne, and not overland from Geelong.

At this time the population of Melbourne and Geelong was growing and soon a demand arose for a seaside resort. In 1852, Shortland’s Bluff, having been chosen as the required location, was surveyed, re-named *Queenscliff*, cut up and sold to willing buyers.

Mr Dod, the first permanent settler, became the first postmaster of Queenscliff in 1854. A son followed in his footsteps and held the joint position of Postmaster and Signals Master until 1884 when he was transferred to Colac.

Soon Cobb and Co. coaches from Geelong, and the first of the “Bay” steamers from Melbourne, were bringing holiday makers to the seaside.

The first lighthouse at Queenscliff was built in 1842. This was a wooden structure with an oil-burning lamp. With the introduction of a second lighthouse in 1863, the former became known as the “lower” light while the new one took on the designation “higher” or “upper” light. These two lights, when correctly aligned indicate the path of safe passage through the Heads.

Fishing was eventually established as an organized industry at Queenscliff. During a period around 1912, it was not uncommon to see 50 or more fishing boats inspecting crayfish pots or taking aboard boxes of barracoota outside the Heads. The opening of a railway service between Queenscliff and Geelong on February 21, 1878, was a great event in the history of Queenscliff, for it enabled the fishermen to quickly get their catches to market and eliminated much of the Cobb and Co. coach travel. It also encouraged the holi-

day-makers which in turn increased local trade.

An adequate supply of fresh water proved to be a problem during the early development of Queenscliff and the surrounding district. At first, wooden barrels sunk in the earth were used to collect seepage water, and it was not until 1889 that the first public water supply was laid down. Since 1932, water from the watershed of the Upper Barwon has been reticulated in the Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale areas.

The “Bay” steamers – *Lady Bird*, *The Williams*, *Ozone*, *Hygeia*, *Weerona*, and others – have come and gone. Cobb and Co. coaches, the railway passenger service, the magnificent full-rigged ships and four masted barques, much of the fishing fleet, and many of the “old timers” have all passed into history, but as a holiday resort Queenscliff lives on.

### Port Phillip Heads – Part 3: Land–Sea Communication Is Developed at Point Lonsdale

(RACV touring article 1965)

There is little doubt that William Buckley, “the wild white man” who escaped as a convict in 1803, was the first “resident” of Point Lonsdale. Legend says that he lived in “Buckley’s Cave” in the cliff beneath the present lighthouse until found by the Batman expedition in 1835. At this stage Buckley had almost forgotten the English language but was later rehabilitated and lived a useful life.

Between 1854 and 1863 an old mariner, Captain Preston, with the safety of shipping in mind, lived alone at Point Lonsdale and nightly through those lonely nine years fixed to the mast of his self-built signal station a little lamp that burnt colza oil. Captain Preston’s self-imposed duties ended when an old wooden lighthouse was moved from Queenscliff and erected at a point some 500 yards west of the site of the present lighthouse. This old light functioned for thirty-nine years being exhibited for the last time on the evening of March 19, 1902, but was not demolished until 1912. The existing lighthouse functioned for the first time at sunset on March 20, 1902.

Point Lonsdale soon began to attract holiday makers who travelled by “Bay” steamers to Queenscliff, and thence by four-in-hand horse drawn “drags”, or cabs. The first boarding house which opened in 1885 occupied the present site of the “Terminus”. “Cottee’s Coffee Palace” was the fore-runner of the present “Kora Weari”, while “Merrilyn” opened early in 1900.

The first shop that sold afternoon teas, and half-penny bars of chocolate, opened in the early 1900s. This





shop with few changes can be seen today near the entrance to the lighthouse reserve. Indeed, apart from the addition of a few amenities such as running water, hot showers and TV, some of the first guest houses have changed but little during the passing years. Some of these have been handed on from father to son, the Clays of "Beach House" included.

Between 1901 and 1910 the head lighthouse keeper was also the Point Lonsdale Postmaster. He handled inward and outward mails and sold stamps through a converted bedroom window in his house which is there today, second from the ramp that leads to the lighthouse. In April, 1910, the Lost Office services were transferred to the Gill family where they remain today having been passed on from father to daughter and continuously conducted in the Gill residence.

Until about 1912, the international code of flag signals was the only means of communication between ships at sea and the shore. As this system depended upon recognition of specific flags by their shapes and colours, the system was not only slow but it was not effective during periods of poor visibility. In 1912 the Morse lamp, which was first used on the Australian coast between the steamer *Marloo* and Wilsons Promontory, came steadily into use. Saturday evenings were always busy at Point Lonsdale when Melbourne football scores were transmitted to passing ships and to the pilot steamer.

However, a new era in ship to shore communication had already begun at Point Lonsdale. This was on the occasion of the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to open the first Federal Parliament in the Melbourne Exhibition Building on May 9th, 1901. The Royal Yacht *Ophir* that brought their Royal Highnesses to Melbourne carried one of the first ship-borne wireless installations. An experimental wireless station installed at the original signal station at the Lonsdale and operated by Mr Jenv[e]y, a Post Office engineer, exchanged greetings with *Ophir* and in doing so established the first\* Australian ship-to-shore wireless link. The first Victorian Marconi wireless station to operate officially was established at The Springs, between Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff, in 1906.

Today the signalman at Point Lonsdale, with the aid of modern equipment maintains continuous voice communication with the pilot steamer and with ships passing through the Heads.

\*Actually the second.

## Port Phillip Heads – Part 4: The "Rip" proves treacherous

(RACV touring article 1965)

From the very earliest days of sea travel into Port Phillip Bay it was discovered that the swirling currents of the "Rip" constituted no ordinary bay entrance and it was quickly realised that to avoid repeated tragedies some form of direct assistance to incoming and outgoing ships would be needed.

Captain Tobin, who began operating in a private capacity in November, 1838, is credited with being the first shipping pilot at Port Phillip Heads. The first licensed pilot was Henry Sutton, whose certificate was dated November 1st, 1839.

Life for the early pilots was one of hardship and endurance. The vessels which they used, mere whaleboats, and after about 1854 small schooners, were difficult to handle in rough weather, and the tents which housed the pilots when on shore were certainly not designed for comfortable living. However, in 1901 the first pilot steamer *Victoria* came into service, and with powered vessels came easier and safer transferring of pilots, as well as more comfortable ship-board conditions.

The pride of Port Phillip sea pilots today is the *Wyuna*, a twin-screw diesel electric ship specially designed for use at the Heads. Although the *Wyuna* has a maximum endurance of twelve months in service, here usual time on station is six months, and when transferred to Melbourne for maintenance or repairs her duties are performed by the relief vessel *Akuna* ex HMAS *Gladstone*.

As the treacherous waters of the Rip began to inflict their toll on early shipping the need was soon felt for a sea-rescue service, and in 1865 the first lifeboat at the Heads was established at Queenscliff. Following the building of a pier at Point Lonsdale, a lifeboat was stationed there also. Then, as today, fishermen made up the lifeboat crews. It was not until 1926 that a motor lifeboat was brought into use at Queenscliff, using at first a petrol driven motor which consumed fuel at the rate of one gallon per mile, but later converted to diesel power. Today, one lifeboat still remains, resting on a slipway at Queenscliff and always ready for immediate use.

Shipwrecks in and near the Rip have been many and various. They have included small ketches and schooners, full-rigged ships, barques, steamers, and at least one overseas Royal Mail liner. The total number of wrecks in this area is probably now more than fifty, in addition to which there have been perhaps another



fifty instances of collisions without sinking, strandings and refloatings, and similar mishaps.

Some wrecks have resulted from poor seamanship and perhaps carelessness, while some have resulted from bad luck, adverse weather or lack of local knowledge, but the “Rip” itself must take the blame for many misfortunes. As an old mariner once said to a younger seaman: “Beware the treacherous Rip; it’s waiting for you, my boy.”

The Rip has always been a navigational hazard due largely to the rapidity of the ebb tide surging out through the narrow bay entrance and boiling up over a rocky submarine platform between the Heads with an effect similar to rapids in a river. When this torrent meets with heavy seas one of the world’s greatest hazards to marine navigation is created.

Today the dangers of the Rip have been steadily reduced. The state of the tide is continually transmitted from Point Lonsdale by the use of canvas shapes or coloured lights. Blasting has gradually increased the maximum depth of water at the Rip since 1881 from 28 feet to 43. But the fury of the Rip remains undaunted, and the spectacle of the ebb tide is no less awe inspiring now than it was to the first white visitors.

## Geelong

(RACV touring article 1965)

Today Victoria’s largest provincial city, Geelong has borne several names since its first days of settlement. Originally it was called Jillong, which has three aboriginal interpretations – “place of native companions”, “white sea bird”, and “place of a cliff”. It was later known as “Coraiya” which became “Corio”, but this was subsequently applied to the bay on which Geelong developed.

Corio Bay was first visited by Lieutenant John Murray in 1802 and later in the same year by Matthew Flinders. Hume and Hovell, who blazed the overland trail from Port Jackson, arrived at Corio Bay in 1824 believing they had reached Western Port Bay.

The first land “sale” in the Geelong area occurred in 1835, when John Batman bought 100,000 acres from the aborigines. It was about this time that William Buckley, “the wild white man” who had escaped as a convict from temporary settlement near Sorrento, was discovered by John Batman’s party and re-introduced to white civilization after a period of 32 years.

Although Geelong was slow to develop, it has become a prosperous city and an advanced sea port. It handles the fifth largest amount of cargo tonnage in Australia,

much of which is wool and wheat. To name but a few of the industries centred in Geelong, there are butter factories, engineering works, textile factories including nine major woollen mills, cement works, automobile manufacture, safety glass production, aluminium smelters, carpet factories and a petroleum refinery.

Under the control of the Geelong Harbor Trust which was constituted in 1905, the Port of Geelong has seventeen shipping berths, modern towing facilities and an entrance channel fifteen miles long, which is dredged to a depth of thirty-six feet and a width of three hundred feet.

To keep pace with Geelong’s rapid growth, the Harbour Trust has accelerated plans for further development. These include the dredging of the channel to 42 feet, and construction of a new dry bulk berth with four 7-ton cranes and a 5,000-foot concrete pier at the inner harbour entrance.

Geelong has several schools and colleges of considerable note. There are various cultural organisations including the Geelong Association of Music and Arts which is probably unique in Australia. There are also the Repertory, Orchestral, Choral and Arts societies.

Greater Geelong, with a population approaching 100,000, includes various suburbs. Two of these, Geelong West, and Newtown and Chilwell combined, are cities in their own right.

Geelong can claim several “firsts”. The first Victorian country train left Geelong for Melbourne on June 25, 1857. The first rope produced in Australia came from a Geelong factory that was opened in 1852 and, having been extended, continues in service today. The first automatic telephone exchange in Australia was established at Geelong. The first Australian wool clip was carried from Geelong to England in the sailing vessel *Lightning* in 1862. (This vessel was destroyed by fire in Corio Bay late in 1868 while preparing to leave for England with a cargo of over 4000 bales of wool, and 18,650 ozs, of gold from Victorian gold-fields.) In 1856 the world’s first system of commercial refrigeration was developed at Geelong. The *Geelong Advertiser*, first published in 1840, is Australia’s oldest newspaper. Geelong was the first city in Victoria to remove electric trams from its streets, and to replace them by buses, one fleet of which was brought into service, owned and managed by a woman – probably the first woman in Australia to undertake such a task.

Queens Park, Eastern Beach, Buckley’s Falls, Stinton’s Claremont Nurseries (now in their 93rd year), the Barwon River and its new bridge, and Ceres Look-out, are but a few of the tourist attractions of Geelong.





## The “Puffing Billy” Story

(RACV touring article 1962)

“Puffing Billy”, always a favourite with young and old alike, will be very much in the news this coming weekend when it makes its historic first journey over the newly renovated section of track to the Lakeside terminal at Emerald Lake. The Governor, Sir Rohan Delacombe, will officiate at the opening of the new section, and thousands of sightseers will undoubtedly make the occasion a memorable one.

In years gone by “Puffing Billy” was the only means, apart from horse-back riding, by which people could travel into the wild bushland of the Dandenong Ranges. Those who enjoyed a picnic or a ramble into the bush would travel by steam train from Melbourne to Upper Ferntree Gully, where they climbed aboard the shining “Puffing Billy”, patiently waiting at its little siding for its open-sided carriages and wooden seats to be filled. As the pint-sized locomotive panted and puffed its way slowly up the narrow track into the wooded hills, delighted children would scramble out of the leading carriages to run along beside the track picking flowers, or take a short cut to the other side of a long bend and watch the little train chugging steadily up to meet them.

In August 1953, heavy rains led to a landslide which buried part of the track between Selby and Menzies Creek and the service was suspended. Investigation was made by the Victorian Railways into the future of the Upper Ferntree Gully – Gembrook service, and official announcement was made that the entire line would be closed.

The expression of public disapproval was immediate and quite overwhelming. Enthusiastic supporters of the general public demand for restoration of the service banded together to form the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, and soon offers of money and assistance are pouring in. Tradesmen, soldiers, students, professional men, school children and scouts devoted their time, efforts, and financial assistance to the organised restoration of “Puffing Billy” to its old glory.

By December 1954, the service had been restored as far as Belgrave, and for a little over three years, trains operated again on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays.

In February, 1958, the line was closed again when work commenced on the extension of the broad-gauge electrified service to Belgrave. The narrow-gauge locomotives and carriages were returned to the Newport workshops.

The Railway commissioners then gave approval for restoration of the eight-mile section of the line between Belgrave and Emerald Lake, stipulating that volunteers of the “Puffing Billy” Society were to work under departmental supervision.

Volunteers built a new passenger terminal and extensive sidings near the Belgrave railway station, using rails and sleepers from the dismantled section. As a training exercise the 3 Field Engineer Regiment of the CMF built an engine shed, coal stage, ash pit and inspection pits. They built a new embankment in front of the landslide and, later, Society volunteers laid a new track through the area to link up with the old line. The army also restored the telephone line along the track, and assisted in building the Lakeside terminus. Victorian Railways bridge gangs and school railway club members also gave valuable service to the Society, and in January 1962, more than 500 rover scouts from the Victorian World Rover Moot worked a full day on the track.

By the middle of 1962, the 60-year-old line had received a new lease of life, and on the last Saturday in July that year, the service was resumed between Belgrave and Menzies Creek.

In just three days time [28 July 1962], exactly three years since the last extension, the Menzies Creek – Emerald Lake section will be in use again, and it is to be hoped that the day of “Puffing Billy’s” triumphant return to Gembrook will be celebrated in the not too distant future.

## Lorne

(RACV touring article 1965)

In the year 1841 Captain Loutit, carrying in his ship the first wool clip from Geelong to London, was forced by Bass Strait gales to seek shelter along the coast. He anchored in a small bay between Port Phillip Heads and Cape Otway. In course of time Captain Loutit’s haven was named Loutit Bay, a name which was later used to identify the settlement that developed on the shores of the bay. In 1869 the name of the settlement, then developing into a township, was changed to Lorne in honor of the Marquis of Lorne.

Lorne, perhaps best known today for its fine surfing beach, has long been a prominent summer resort for Victorians. At first, bay steamers, and soon after, early roads, opened up the resorts of Queenscliff and Portsea as popular beach resorts. Similarly, the development of Lorne as a beach resort occurred early in the history of tourism in Victoria. Today there are a large number of guest houses in the town, two good hotels



and a modern motel providing tourist accommodation, and four well-established areas for campers.

Travel to Lorne before the advent of the Great Ocean Road was difficult and often dangerous. First, over the rugged Otway Ranges came packhorses, to be followed by bullock waggons, the Cobb and Co. coaches, and finally self-propelled motor vehicles. Today access from Melbourne to Lorne may be had via two alternate bitumen-sealed routes, which may be joined to provide an excellent round trip. From Melbourne to Lorne via Winchelsea, Bambra and Deans Marsh the distance is 99 miles. A return via Aireys Inlet, Anglesea and Torquay covers 87 miles. Thirty-eight miles of these routes in each direction follow the two-way divided highway between Brooklyn and Geelong.

The beautiful Otway Ranges, which reach the sea in the vicinity of Lorne, contain numerous waterfalls, deep fern gullies and mountain scenery. A number of hiking tracks and winding roads traverse the area close to Lorne, and in spring and summer a profusion of wildflowers may be seen. Along the tracks or in the gullies a fleeting wallaby may be seen, or kookaburras and bell-birds heard.

Of the several waterfalls close to Lorne including Kyles, Cora Lyn, Margaret, Melba, Henderson, Splitters, Wan Wandah Falls and others, perhaps the Erskine Falls, four miles inland, offer the grandest sight. Closer to Lorne is Teddy's Lookout, named after Teddy the ranger who used the lookout to spy out stray cattle on nearby Mt St George. There is also the pier, the fishing boats, the golden sand, blue gums reaching almost to the breakers, and the ocean itself, white-capped or placid as the winds and the weather decide.

As a touring brochure declares: "A fair lady is Lorne with frills of white surf on skirts of jewelled sea and the hem of blonde sand for her blue mountain cloak."

Day-visitors to Lorne this summer could include in their trip one of the following surf carnivals or surf meetings: Torquay Surfathon, Torquay, Saturday, January 1st. Surf Carnival, Anglesea, Sunday, January 9th. Surf Carnival, Torquay, Sunday January 30th. Board Rally, Torquay, Sunday, March 27th.

For the visitor who might be running for several days at Lorne, a trip to Apollo Bay must be rewarding. The route, 28 miles in length, is one of the most beautiful ocean drives on the Australian coast. The lookout at Cape Patton, 17 miles from Lorne and at an elevation of 247 feet, presents a fine coastal panorama. Apollo Bay has a safe surfing beach and most of the amenities found in a modern town.

## Colac and District

(RACV touring article 1965)

The City of Colac derives its origin from the first settlement in the district in 1837 by Hugh Murray, a pastoralist after whom the principal street in the city is named. It is located on the southern shore of Lake Colac, which is 10 square miles in area and which has a circumference of approximately 20 miles.

Colac, often mentioned as the metropolis of the South Western District is within one of the most fertile agricultural, dairying and pastoral areas of the State. It serves as a centre of a district renowned for its high fertility and productive capacity.

The Colac Road District was created on May 11th 1859. The Road District was abolished and the Shire of Colac proclaimed on May 10th, 1864. Climbing through the status of a Borough and a Town. Colac was proclaimed a City on March 5th, 1960.

The City of Colac lies 93 miles by road from Melbourne, at an elevation of 437 feet. It has an average rainfall of 27–30 inches, while temperatures range from an average high of 79.1 degrees in February to an average low of 39.8 degrees in July.

In a short summary such as this, it is impossible to list all of Colac's primary and secondary industries. Dairying; onion and potato growing; pig, cattle and sheep raising; the manufacture of aerated waters, cordials, clothing, bricks and plaster boards; and the harvesting of oats, linseed, millet, rye grass and hay, are but a few of these industries. There are approximately 100 factories. The turn-over of the Colac Dairying Co. Ltd. alone for one year was recently £3,411,265.

During the period of early development of Colac, the railway station was a busy centre. First came the rail connection with Geelong in 1877. Then, in 1889, a branch line was opened to Beeac, to be followed in 1891 with a line to Forrest. In 1902 the Beech Forest line was opened and extended to Crowe's in 1911. Each of these branch lines has since been closed. For sixty years wagons of timber and potatoes, and passenger carriages, were hauled over 2000 feet down the twisting mountain line from Beech Forest to Colac by a sturdy locomotive which became widely known by the familiar name "The Beechie". This train carried its final load of Railway Historical Society passengers on June 30th, 1962, on an excursion which marked the final closure of the Beech Forest railway.

One of the earliest dairy farms near Colac was established around the year 1890. The homestead, built of timber from the Otway forests, can still be seen today,





bordered by aging pines, and adjacent to the Princes Highway about 1½ miles east of the city.

Both to the south and to the north of Colac are various points of interest. To the south are the Otway forests which provide logs for an industry which is second in the district in importance only to dairying. Good bitumen roads connect Colac with Gellibrand and Forrest, two of the timber-getting focal points. Approximately 30 mills produce more than £1,500,000 worth of timber annually. Main species of timber grown in the district are Mountain Ash, Manna Gum, Messmate and Blue Gum. North of Colac, near Alvie, is the volcanic area known as Red Rock, with its fascinating crater lakes and twin lookouts. A day tour to Red Rock will be featured in the January issue of *Royalauto*.

## Flinders

(RACV touring article 1965)

The town of Flinders and the Flinders Naval Depot are often confused, one being taken to mean the other.

The township of Flinders, located at the western entrance to Westernport Bay, was named after Matthew Flinders who, between October, 1798, and January the following year sailed around Tasmania with George Bass and proved it to be an island. Bass Strait that laps the shores of Flinders was named after Flinders' companion on the voyage.

In an endeavor to overcome the early isolation of Tasmania from the mainland, a submarine telegraph cable was laid between Flinders and Low Head, in northern Tasmania, in 1883. This was a private venture which never proved to be a reliable means of communication. It was replaced in 1902 by two new telegraph cables known respectively as the "East" and the "West" cable, each approximately 190 miles in length and operated by the Post Master General's Department. Normally, telegraph traffic was handled over these cables direct between Melbourne and Launceston through automatic repeaters located in the Flinders Post Office. On occasions, perhaps due to a "leak" in one of the cables and when direct intercommunication between the two terminals was difficult, manual relay at Flinders was necessary. All cable testing, which was a daily routine, was effected at Flinders, usually around 7 am when telegraph traffic was light.

One of the first outward signs in Australia of the beginning of the 1914–1918 war was quickly in evidence at Flinders. Within hours of the declaration of war an army detachment was busy there, setting up camp, digging trenches and mounting guard over the Tasmanian cable terminals.

Flinders, 54 miles from Melbourne via Frankston and Hastings, is a seaside resort where much of the original township can still be seen nestling amongst a sprinkling of modern residences. Fishing, golf and tennis are the main sporting activities. Scenic coastal walks are available to the more energetic tourist. In the surrounding area there is fruit growing, and cattle and sheep raising. Close at hand are the many other attractions of the Mornington Peninsula.

The Flinders Naval Base, now more correctly known as HMAS *Cerberus*, is close to Stony Point, 17 road miles on the Melbourne side of Flinders township.

At the entrance to *Cerberus* stand three weather-beaten figureheads on perpetual guard. The figureheads, the pride of long-forgotten ship builders of another era, are those of a woman with a tiara and necklace of pearls, a bare-chested gentleman with a beard, and an imposing gladiator.

The lady with the pearls adorned the prow of HMS *Pearl* which sailed and fought for Britain between 1828 and 1851. The other two figureheads came from HMS *Encounter* and HMS *Pylades*.

*Encounter* was a name applied to five separate men-o'-war extending from early 1800 through to 1912. Of six *Pylades*, the first was originally named *Hercules* and was captured by the British from the Americans during the War of Independence. The fourth vessel of this name was based at Sydney for several years, while the last of the line of *Pylades*, a World War Two minesweeper, was sunk by torpedo off the French coast immediately after D-Day.

The last-mentioned two figure heads came respectively from *Encounter* number three and *Pylades* number three.

The RACV Mornington Peninsula map and its accompanying touring information pamphlet are available to members visiting either Flinders or HMAS *Cerberus*.



## Mornington Peninsula An abridged history and The origin of some place names

0765

Royal Automobile Club Of Victoria  
Touring Department

### *Mornington Peninsula*

Mornington Peninsula is a boot-shaped area approximately 30 miles long in a north-east-south-west direction, and 12 to 15 miles wide in a general east-west direction. It separates Port Phillip Bay from Western Port Bay. Bass Strait abuts the "sole" of the "boot".

There is some doubt as to the identity of the first white man to step ashore on Mornington Peninsula. The young explorer George Bass, who travelled in a ship's lifeboat from Sydney, landed at Western Port Bay on December 20 1797. It may fairly be claimed that Bass was the first white man to set foot on Victorian soil but it is reasonably certain that this took place near the eastern entrance to Western Port Bay, possibly near the present site of Rhyll on Phillip Island, and not on Mornington Peninsula. Then there was Lieutenant Murray in command of HMS *Lady Nelson*, the first sailing vessel to enter Port Phillip Bay on February 15 1802. Murray landed near the present site of Sorrento and on March 9 1802 raised the Colors of Great Britain and Ireland at Point King and took possession of Port Phillip in the name of King George III. However, before Murray brought his ship through the Heads, Mr Bowen, the Mate of that ship, had already entered Port Phillip Bay in a whaleboat. Bowen climbed Arthur's Seat but whether this occurred before, or after, Murray's landing is not clear. It does seem clear, however, that either Bowen or Murray was the first white man to tread the shores of Mornington Peninsula.

Soon after Murray's landing, Matthew Henry Flinders, another explorer and navigator of note, on April 20 1802, also landed on the Peninsula and also ascended Arthur's Seat. Apparently the weather at that time was fine and the atmosphere clear as Flinders saw, spread out before him, a wonderful view that extended from the distant Otway Ranges, through the You Yangs on the far side of the Bay; to the Blue Dandenongs and the nearer hills of South Gippsland. That view is there today with the added attraction of farms, orchards, and scattered settlements.

One of the earliest settlers was a Mr J. E. Sage who, in 1841, having helped to deliver a mob of cattle from Sydney, settled on a property near Mount Eliza which he called "Carrup Carrup".

In the meantime, however, some spasmodic attempts had been made to settle in the Cape Schanck area. A Mr Charles Campbell took up land there but soon sold to Mr Robert Jamieson who in turn soon sold again.

The first settlement at Dromana was on a property called "Kangerong", a name that today is remembered in the Parish of Kangerong, Flinders Shire, and in a Guest House of that name.

Mornington had its beginning at Fossil Beach two miles to the south of its present site. When a pier was built at Schnapper Point to facilitate the shipment of firewood to Melbourne, settlement developed around the pier site. The name Schnapper Point was retained as the name of the headland above the pier but the settlement later was named Mornington. The first school on the Peninsula was built at Schnapper Point.

During the early days of settlement numerous kangaroos and dingoes proved to be a problem. In one drive to clear the area of kangaroos, 800 of these animals were captured in yards built from bush timber. Skirmishes with the native tribesmen were also troublesome at times although the natives in this area were generally peaceful and readily adopted much of the white man's way of life. They would do almost anything in return for a piece of "damper". It is interesting to note that the Peninsula seems never to have carried a large native population despite the availability of ample natural food both on land and in the sea.

Supplies for the early settlers on the Peninsula were delivered by bullock wagons which were often bogged for days in low-lying parts at the northern end of the Peninsula. The route from Frankston to Melbourne, known as the "Fish Track", along beach to Brighton thence overland proved little better. Mail was delivered by someone on horseback who could find the time to travel to the metropolis to collect the mail.

The first substantial house built on Mornington Peninsula is there still. In 1844, Mr G. C. McCrae, who had taken up Arthur's Seat Run, built for himself and his family a homestead that today is known as the McCrae Homestead. It is located at No. 8 Charles Street, McCrae, which is but a short distance off the Nepean Highway and almost behind the McCrae lighthouse. Timber for the house was felled locally and dragged to the site by bullocks. Hand-made nails were used in the construction of this fine home. 3,000 bricks for the chimneys were brought from Melbourne in the ketch *Jemima*.

Much of the original furniture, drawings, paintings and pictures are still in the McCrae Homestead. With the old wine-glasses and other relics of the past there





is one item that seems to be of particular interest in this house that for so many years has over-looked the sea. This is a swinging cabin lamp from the barque *Argyle* that brought the McCrae family from the “old country” in 1841.

The McCrae Homestead is open to visitors:

- 1st December until after Easter Daily:
  - 10 a.m. to noon; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- After Easter until 30th November:
  - Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday 10 a.m. to noon;
  - Sunday and Public holidays 11 a.m. to noon; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Immediately inside the western entrance to Western Port Bay and at the south eastern extremity of Mornington Peninsula is the town of Flinders. This part of the peninsula was first sighted by Lieutenant Grant in HMS *Lady Nelson* in the year 1801. Flinders, which still retains much of its rustic beauty, and its peace and quietness of earlier years, has an historic association with early communications.

In 1883 a submarine telegraph cable was laid from Flinders to Low Head in Tasmania. Neither this cable nor one that had been laid in 1867 from the Victorian coast near Cape Otway, via King Island, to Stanley in Tasmania proved satisfactory.

With Federation and a need for vastly improved interstate communications, two new cables were laid between Flinders and Low Head in 1909. These were known as the “East” Cable, 190.460 nautical miles long, and the “West”, 189.083 nautical miles long. At Flinders the cables dropped into the sea from a cable hut on the beach a few yards to the south of the present pier.

With the introduction of a submarine telephone cable across Bass Strait from Apollo Bay to Stanley in 1935, the old “East” and “West” cables were put on standby. In 1942 those portions of these cables that could be recovered were lifted from the ocean bed and, as a war measure, re-laid across Torres Strait from Cape York to Delena, Papua. They were abandoned in 1944. This abridged history of Mornington Peninsula would not be complete without mention of its two “half-time” schools that belonged to a period that has now passed into Education Department history.

These two schools, served by one teacher, were located one at Main Ridge behind Red Hill, and the other about half a mile on the Rosebud side of the junction of Cape Schanck and Boneo Roads. This latter school was locally known as “Black’s Camp” but officially it

was Cape Schanck State School No. 2168. The lone teacher, travelling on horseback, alternated each day between the two schools thus providing a teaching service at a particular school on Monday, Wednesday, Friday of one week, and Tuesday and Thursday of the following week. Alternate days, were, of course, spent at the other school. Attendance at the Cape Schanck school was seldom more than 8 pupils and sometimes 3 or 4. Most of the pupils walked three miles each way between the lighthouse and the school. This school was opened in July 1879 and finally closed in 1921. Some indication of the size of the building might be gained from the fact that, when it was sold for removal, it realised only £82.

### *Origins of some place-names*

#### **Arthur’s Seat (1051 ft)**

Mr Bowen, Mate of the *Lady Nelson*, in 1802, wrote in his log: “There is a high mountain which I have named ‘Arthur’s Seat’ from its resemblance to a mountain of that name a few miles from Edinburgh, Scotland.”

#### **Balcombe**

From the Balcombe family who owned a property, “The Briars”, in the area during early settlement.

#### **Brighton**

Originally “Watervale”, it was re-named Brighton in 1841 after Brighton in England.

#### **Bass Strait**

From George Bass of the Bass and Flinders team who sailed around Tasmania and proved it to be an island.

#### **Cape Schanck**

From Captain John Schanck at the British Admiralty who invented a retractable keel fitted to Lt Grant’s *Lady Nelson* which enabled the vessel to sail into shallow waters during her employment on exploration work (*Lady Nelson*, later under command of Lt Murray, was the first sailing vessel to enter Port Phillip Bay.)

#### **Crib Point**

During the early days of exploration a small hut was built there. The hut was used by explorers and others in which to have lunch, or “crib”, hence Crib Point.

#### **Flinders**

From Matthew Flinders (see Bass Strait above).

#### **Frankston**

From Charles Franks who, in 1854, was killed by



Aborigines and buried on Flagstaff Hill, the first Port Phillip burial place after 1838.

### **Gippsland**

Originally known as “Gipps’ Land” and named by Count Paul Strzelecki in 1840 after Governor Gipps of Port Jackson.

### **McCrae**

From the McCrae family who settled on the southern side of Arthur’s Seat in 1844, on Arthur’s Seat Run.

### **Merricks**

Probably from Maurice Meyrick, who fought a duel nearby with a Mr E. Baker.

### **Moorabbin**

Believed to have come from the Moorabbin native tribe a that visited the Peninsula from time to time.

### **Mordialloc**

From the Aboriginal “*Moody Yallock*” meaning “Near a tidal stream”.

### **Mornington**

From one authority: Originally Schnapper Point, later re-named after Lord Mornington who became the Marquis of Wellesley, Governor of India. From another authority: Named after Mornington, Ireland.

### **Mount Eliza**

From Eliza, wife of Captain Hobson of HMS *Rattlesnake*.

### **Mount Martha**

From Martha, wife of Captain Lonsdale, Superintendent of Port Phillip.

### **Point Nepean**

From Sir Ewen Nepean, an early Secretary to the British Admiralty.

### **Rosebud**

From the ketch *Rosebud* wrecked there 1851.

### **Schnapper Point**

From the type of fish that abounded there (see also Mornington).

### **Shoreham**

Named by the first school master in the area, after his native English Shoreham.

### **Sorrento**

From the seaport village of that name on Dublin Bay,

Ireland. It was thus named by the Commissioner of Lands (Sir Charles Gavan Duffy) in the late 1850s.

### *Short summary of dates*

#### **1801**

Lt Grant in *Lady Nelson* passed through Bass Strait naming Cape Otway and Cape Schanck but did not realize that Port Phillip Bay existed.

#### **Early February 1802**

The first white man set foot on Mornington Peninsula.

#### **March 9 1802**

Port Phillip taken possession in the name of King George III.

#### **October 10 1803**

First death recorded. John Skilhorn.

#### **November 25 1803**

First birth recorded. William James Hobart Thorne.

#### **November 28 1803**

First marriage recorded. Richard Garrett and Hanna Harvey.

#### **1858**

Cape Schanck lighthouse established.

#### **1868**

First Post Office opened Mornington. The building, used as a store, still exists.

#### **1814**

McCrae (officially known as Eastern) lighthouse established.

#### **July 1819**

Cape Schanck State School No. 2168 opened (finally closed 1921).

#### **1883**

First “private” Flinders – Low Head (Tasmania) submarine telegraph Cable laid (unsatisfactory).

#### **1909**

First “official” Flinders – Low Head submarine telegraph cable laid (recovered in parts 1942).

### *Short municipal history*

**Cranbourne**, created a District June 19 1860; proclaimed a Shire March 6 1868 (later redefined).

**Frankston**, created a District November 6 1860, proclaimed a Shire November 24 1871.



**Flinders**, created a District December 1 1868, proclaimed a Shire 1 December 24 1874 (name changed from Flinders and Kangerong to Flinders January 28 1914).

**Mornington**, constituted a Shire May 31 1893 (name changed from New Mornington to Mornington January 19 1894).

**Hastings**, constituted a Shire October 18 1961.

## Port Campbell Attractions

(RACV touring article 1965)

The coastline at Port Campbell, the highlight of a tour along the Great Ocean Road, has been described as the most magnificent in the Southern Hemisphere for easily accessible coastal scenery.

Along the coastal strip from Anglesea to Apollo Bay, the steep Otway Ranges plunge straight into the sea forming picturesque headlands and bays. But in the vicinity of Port Campbell, the high, level country terminates abruptly at sheer cliffs of up to 300 feet, resulting in natural archways, deep caves, islands, grottos and blowholes along twenty miles of spectacular coastline.

Coastal features to the west of Port Campbell are Two Mile Bay, Marble Arch, Murray Steps, Point Hesse, London Bridge, and The Grotto, while to the east are Beacon Steps, Sentinel Rock, Goudie's Outlook, Haystack Rock, Baker's Oven Rock, Sherbrook River, Broken Head Point and Steps, Thunder Cave and Survey Steps, The Blow Hole, Mutton Bird Island, Elephant Rock, Loch Ard Gorge, Island Archway, the Twelve Apostles and Gibsons Steps. Tracks have been made to most of these spots.

For motorists travelling to Port Campbell via Lavers Hill and Princetown, Gibsons Steps are the first coastal feature encountered, the turnoff being just three miles west of Princetown.

Next are the Twelve Apostles, probably the best known feature on the coast. Consisting of twelve tiny islands quite close to the cliffs, they stretch along the coast for some two miles. Actually small isolated portions of the mainland cliffs, many of them are far taller than their width at the base, standing defiant in the face of pounding seas. A good track leads to the cliff top at the eastern end of the group, where an excellent view can be had of nearly all the islands.

Loch Ard Gorge, a large indentation in the coast about six miles west of Princetown, contains a large sandy beach and several deep caves. The heavy ocean swell

can be seen rolling through the narrow entrance into a small, partially enclosed bay. Steps lead to the floor of the gorge where the beach and caves may be inspected. Sheltered by high cliffs, the western end of the beach is ideal for picnics, but the beach is unsafe for swimming except in extremely calm weather due to strong under-currents. The gorge takes its name from the 1,623-ton clipper *Loch Ard*, which was wrecked there during the early hours of June 1st, 1878, with the loss of 50 lives. The sole survivors, a Mr Tom Pearce and a Miss Carmichael, were carried by chance through the turbulent entrance of the gorge to the safety of the beach.

Mutton Bird Island, only a stone's throw from the mainland, is a vast breeding ground for mutton birds, which arrive every year in mid November to establish their nests. Each evening during summer, the birds return to the island in thousands, each carrying fish to feed their young. The nesting season lasts until mid March, when the birds go out to sea for the winter months.

The Blow Hole, a large hole about 100 yards in from the cliff edge, provides a spectacular sight in rough weather when heavy seas enter the long tunnel connecting it with the sea and issue forth clouds of spray. Steps lead to the entrance of the tunnel, and a close view of the surging water. Nearby, Survey Steps lead down a small gorge to Thunder Cave, which takes its name from the booming sound of waves rushing into it along a deep channel. Steps lead to a rock ledge which can be reached during calm seas for a closer look at the cave.

Sherbrook River offers a restful change of scenery. It is a popular picnic spot, with conveniences and fireplace handy to the beach and river, where there is a particularly safe swimming spot for children.

Marble Arch, a few miles west of Port Campbell, is a large archway on a ledge of rock. Steps lead down to the ledge enabling visitors to view it at close range.

A little further to the west, a long neck of the mainland with two large archways and waves washing through them has been named London Bridge. Steps lead down the cliff nearby to a small beach which is good for picnics. Penguins nest in the rocks along the cliff edge and can often be seen nestling at the back of a dark cavity. This little beach is very steep, and the boiling waves present a truly awesome sight. Needless to say, it is out of the question for swimming.



## Shipwrecks

(RACV touring article 1965)

A shipwreck in modern times, is, fortunately, a rare occurrence. Reliable steam or motor propulsion, improved navigational aids particularly in the electronic field, more accurate charting of coastal waters, radio communication, and advances in seamanship techniques, each have played their part in making sea travel safer.

Radio and radar alone have had a particular impact on the safety of life at sea. The regular receipt of time signals from shore stations and from which ship's chronometers, a vital part of maritime navigation equipment, may be accurately set is but one facet of the improvement in facilities.

In the days of sail when the winds and the weather often combined to make war against the mariner and when that mariner was often forced to navigate with the aid of a chronometer that was inaccurate, it is not surprising that a landfall after a long voyage without sight of land was in turn often inaccurate.

Shipwrecks on the Australian coast dating back to 1629 when the Dutch vessel *Batavia* came to grief near the Monte Bello Islands on the northwest coast of Western Australia, now total approximately 1500. On King Island in Bass Strait alone there have been 57 known wrecks. The greatest Australian shipping disaster in terms of lives lost occurred on King Island in 1845 when the Ship *Cataraqui* was lost there with 399 souls. Only 9 were saved. But the western coast of Victoria has also been the graveyard of many fine ships, some relics of which may still be seen under favorable weather and tide conditions. Several of these happened to be vessels endeavoring to find the entrance to Port Phillip Bay in adverse weather conditions and being driven ashore in the process.

In the early hours of September 4 1880, the American vessel *Eric the Red* struck a reef about two miles off Cape Otway. This vessel was carrying a cargo of exhibits for the International Exhibition being held in Melbourne and broke in two almost immediately. Goods included pianos, cases of silver plate, toys, organs, sewing machines and many other valuable items. Wreckage came ashore at widely dispersed places including Westernport Bay, Kennet River, Apollo Bay and Port Campbell. The rusted ship's anchor and chain may still be seen at low tide a short distance on the Apollo Bay side of the Cape Otway lighthouse reserve.

The large barquentine *Speculant* rounded Cape Otway

on February 10 1911 in a strong south-westerly gale and misty conditions, the Captain believing his ship to be well clear of land. Without warning the vessel went ashore at Cape Patton. Portions of the keel and a few pieces of rusted metal may still be seen, near a cave a short distance to the east of Cape Patton.

Point Lonsdale is another graveyard. But here, due mainly to strong tides, and to gales and heavy seas that seem always to quickly build up in the train of most shipwrecks, there are few visible signs of past wrecks. There are, however, to be found embedded in the reef below the lighthouse several iron hooks that were placed there to assist in salvaging cargo from the 4-masted Barque *George Roper* which went ashore in fog on July 4 1883.

Weather has not been responsible for all maritime losses on the Victorian coast, one in particular among others being that of *City of Rayville*. Early in the evening of November 8 1940, this large and fully loaded steamer of about 17,000 tons struck an enemy mine about six miles southeast of Cape Otway and sank within a few minutes. Fishermen from Apollo Bay, in hazardous weather conditions and after great effort picked up 39 of the 40 crew members of *City of Rayville*. The vessel lies in 210 feet of water but to date no effort seems to have been made to salvage the cargo much of which consisted of copper and lead.

## A Boat

(RACV touring article 1966)

The 1966 Boat Show commences on Friday of this week, July 22nd, at the Melbourne Exhibition Building. It will be open to the public each day excepting Sunday between 11 am and 10 pm until the evening of July 30. It is expected that a variety of boats will be on display ranging in size from 10 ft to 34 ft and including a trimaran and several yachts.

Officially a boat is a vessel under 65 ft in length but by common useage the word "boat" now applies to a variety of vessels, large and small. There are Manly Ferry Boats, and Murray River Boats; there are yachts and cabin cruisers. Indeed the commander of the mammoth trans-Atlantic liner *Queen Mary* has heard his floating palace referred to as a boat. But these are not really boats in the mind of the sailor. To the sailor a boat is "a small, open, oared or sailing vessel", although he will concede that an engine may now be included as a means of propulsion.

All commercial and some pleasure vessels that go to sea carry one or more boats. In most cases these are called life boats although some vessels, such as light-







*A boat – going ashore at Clifly Is. Lighthouse.*

house tenders, carry also work boats.

Ship's life boats vary in size and may be of wood or metal construction. The average dimensions of a life boat would be about 28 ft long, 8 ft wide and 4 ft deep. Each life boat is accurately measured as the figures obtained determine the number of people that can be safely carried. The length, width and depth are multiplied together, a safety factor applied, and the result divided by 10, thus allowing in effect one person to each 10 cubic feet of internal space. These boats are always carefully maintained, fully equipped, and kept ready for immediate use should a necessity arise. They are stocked with water, biscuits, spare life jackets, a compass, oars, sails, sea anchor, distress signals, and buoyancy tanks. If time permits when leaving a sinking ship additional equipment may be placed in the boats. At least one chronometer, a sextant, charts, spare rope and tackle, and probably extra food and water would be added.

The longest known voyage made by a ship's life boat resulted from the loss of the steamer *Trevesa* in the Indian Ocean on June 4 1923. This steamer sprang a leak in a heavy seaway and quickly sank. The crew, totalling 44 men, with some considerable difficulty got away in two of the ship's life boats and spent over 3 weeks at sea. One boat reached Rodriguez Island after a voyage of 1556 miles in 22 days 19 hours, while the other boat (having missed Rodriguez in the dark) reached Mauritius in 24 days 20 hours after sailing 1747 miles. If time had allowed someone to collect the chronometers before abandoning the ship, more accurate navigation would have been possible thus allowing the boats to shape a direct course over a shorter distance of 1330 miles to Rodriguez.

*Trevesa's* Captain, who, as a result of wartime sinkings, had already experienced life in open boats, firmly believed that condensed milk was a vital stores ne-

cessity in life boats. He stocked his boats in this case accordingly. Throughout those three weeks of great hardship, through storms and calms, through days and nights, in great discomfort and often thoroughly wet to the skin and cold, all but a few of the men survived on about 3 tablespoons of condensed milk, one ship's biscuit and less than a small cup of water issued three times daily.

The *RACV Boating Guide*, pages 11, 14, 15 and 41, provides useful information for boating enthusiasts, on safety aspects of this sport.

## Migratory Birds

(RACV touring article 1965)

Throughout the world many types of birds are migratory. Despite all dangers of storms, droughts, forest fires, and man himself, millions of birds undertake phenomenal migratory flights, sometimes returning via the out-going route, but sometimes following a figure of eight route. Sometimes whole continents and oceans are spanned in the course of these flights.

The Wandering Albatross, which possibly circumnavigates the earth several times in a year, has never fully been understood. This bird often followed sailing vessels for many days particularly in the Cape Horn area, seemingly never resting or eating. It can still be seen from passenger steamers in southern latitudes.

The Artic Tern, a midget by comparison with the albatross, breeds in northern Canada, Greenland and Iceland, and winters on the south and west coasts of Africa but penetrates as far south as Antarctica. This bird travels up to 11,000 miles twice a year.

The Swallow, with which we are all familiar, is another small bird that migrates. Seldom if ever will a swallow be seen during winter in Victoria. However, as a harbinger of Spring, the swallow will suddenly appear, in the meantime having flown to distant places and covered a round distance of 5,000 to 7,000 miles.

The Mutton Bird, so well known on the islands of Bass Strait, on parts of the South Australian, Tasmanian and New Zealand coasts, and to a lesser extent on our Phillip Island, is another bird that "goes north for the winter". It has an amazingly regular flight pattern.

This bird leaves Bass Strait in our Autumn, veers wide out from the east coast of Australia towards New Zealand, then wings away across the Pacific Ocean to pass our winter months off the coast of Japan and in the Bering Sea. When Autumn comes to the North Pacific Ocean this bird flies down the coast of North America, then heads diagonally across the Pacific to



hit the Australian coast in late September and in October and November. Its flight path follows a figure-of-eight pattern.

The Mutton Bird population estimates vary, but a figure of 120 million has been calculated. Despite the 20,000-mile trans-equatorial flight of these birds, it is on the last leg of their flight back to Australia that disaster awaits them. In the final sweep into Bass Strait they encounter strong head winds and often gales. Partly exhausted after their long homeward flight, dead Mutton Birds can sometimes be seen in hundreds, washed up on beaches of eastern Australia.

The name “Mutton Bird” was adopted by early settlers on Bass Strait islands who found the flesh of the birds not unlike mutton. In fact the bird is a short-tailed or slender-billed shearwater, otherwise *Puffinus tenuirostris*!

The early settlers also called the bird the “Yowler” because of its high-pitched screech. In small rookeries where there might be but a few chicks during a hatching season, and where individual calls can be distinguished from the multitude, the call of the young Mutton Bird can sound like the cry of a child in pain.

Perhaps the outstanding feature of the Mutton Bird, and one that continues to amaze naturalists, is its uncanny accurate homing to its previous precise nesting place.

## New Zealand

(RACV touring article 1966)

We normally think of New Zealand as two islands, North Island and South Island, separated by Cook Strait, a tempestuous 20 miles of sea. There are, however, many other islands including Stewart, the Chathams, Auckland, Great Barrier, Bounty, Campbell, Snares and others.

The length of coastline of the two main islands is approximately 4,000 miles encircling areas totalling 105,736 square miles, an interesting feature being that no part of New Zealand is more than 75 miles from the sea. Another interesting point is that over 75% of the surface area is higher than 650 feet, the highest point being Mt Cook, 12,549 ft, near the centre of the South Island.

Legendary landings on New Zealand soil were made by Polynesians about 950 AD and again about 1150 AD but historians and anthropologists claim that the first settlement by a large number of immigrants occurred in approximately 1350 when fleets of canoes brought many hundreds of islanders from whom

Maoris claim ancestry. The first recorded white man to discover New Zealand was Abel Tasman in 1642–45. Captain Cook charted both islands in 1769–70. Whalers, sealers and traders were the first white settlers and began to arrive about 1840.

Land purchase in New Zealand, from 1840 onward, caused considerable friction between the whites and Maoris. Considerable complexity existed in regard to ownership. The Maoris failed to understand permanence of transfer of ownership implied in selling land. Prior to white settlement both occupied and untenanted land was divided among tribes with declared boundaries; land ownership was a tribal, not an individual matter and depended on both conquest and permanent occupation. Some blood shed, the setting up of various “Boards” “Courts” and “Trusts”, and Parliamentary enactments, perhaps particularly the *Maori Land Act* of 1929, finally brought about a clear understanding of this complex and contentious matter.

The population of the two main islands is now approximately 2.5 million, the chief towns and their populations being Auckland (466,300), Christchurch (226,800), Wellington (155,300) and Dunedin (106,100).

The scenic beauties of New Zealand can perhaps be summarized in the following few words. There is an extensive lake system with fast flowing rivers and steep waterfalls; there are several glaciers and large expanses of snowfields particularly in the Southern Alps; there are rich plains, river flats, and perhaps of particular note there are the geysers, hot and cold water ones, steaming lakes, mud pools, boiling springs, mineral baths and Maori guides, all readily available at Rotorua (Maori name for Second Lake), 144 miles south east of Auckland. Hot water, piped straight from back yard bores at Rotorua, is freely used for household central heating and cooking. Unfortunately, a high sulphur content makes this water unsuitable for drinking or washing. Steam from deep bores is now being used to drive turbines that generate large quantities of electrical power, the Wairaki power station alone producing 266,000 kilowatts, about one seventh of the North Island’s power needs.

New Zealand has been called the most concentrated wonderland of scenery and sport in the world.

Already the RACV Travel Service is planning its next Christmas Escorted Tour to this holiday paradise across the Tasman.





## Cotton Growing

(RACV touring article 1966)

Cotton fibre has been used by man since ancient times, as far back as 3000 BC, but only in the last 200 years has it become one of the most important raw materials in world-wide use. The world uses some 24 billion lbs of cotton lint a year.

Cotton grows best in warm conditions and where not stressed by moisture shortage. It will produce good crops in sub-tropical, temperate and arid regions provided it is irrigated. Countries that produce cotton include Australia, parts of India, Pakistan, Russia, Brazil, Peru and particularly the Cotton Belt of the southern states of the USA.

Botanically, cotton is related to the familiar hibiscus. By nature, it is a perennial shrub reaching to about 12 feet high. Commercially it is grown as an annual to a height of four feet or less. It has a deep tap root which grows quickly to a depth of five feet or more thus assisting in its drought-resisting quality. Controlled irrigation is, however, the answer to sturdy growth and profitable production.

Behaviour of the cotton plant is fairly precise and predictable. Seedlings emerge 4 to 14 days after sowing, depending on soil temperature. Flowers appear about 60 days after the seedlings and are creamy white, about 2½ inches long and 2 inches across when open. Within 4 days the flowers change from creamy white through pink to red, mauve or purple and the petals fall. After a lapse of about 25 days from petal-fall a boll, or seed capsule, develops. After a further 35 to 55 days the boll bursts and exposes the "seed cotton". Harvesting then commences and this is usually repeated three or four weeks later. In some countries hand harvesting is still practiced, although mechanical harvesters are now widely used.

Until the 18th century, cotton fibres were spun and woven by hand processes. In 1793 a cotton "gin" was invented and this revolutionised the cotton processing industry. A gin is a mechanised means of working harvested seed cotton in a manner that separates the lint (raw cotton fibre) from the seed. Recent publicity given to cotton growing as a part of the Ord River scheme in northwest Western Australia might lead one to believe that the industry is quite new to Australia but this is not so. Queensland has been Australia's cotton growing State for 100 years or more. In 1840 Queensland produced its first commercial cotton which, in 1870, achieved a peak of 7½ million lbs of lint. After the end of the Civil War, the USA began

to produce large quantities of cotton by cheap labor. This cotton was exported to countries such as Australia more cheaply than it could be grown locally, thus strangling the local industry. In course of time, however, Australia again took an interest in cotton growing which now is an expanding industry in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and to some extent in Victoria. In the area around Narrabri – Wee Waa, over 10,000 acres, all irrigated from the Keepit Dam on the Namoi River, are under cotton. It has been forecast that by 1970 50,000 acres in New South Wales alone will be under cotton and yield a \$12 million crop.

By-products of the cotton industry are surprisingly large in number. After the seed cotton has been ginned, various by-products are used in the manufacture of cotton-seed oil which in turn is used in the manufacture of margarine and cooking oils. Others find their way into rayon, gun powder, films, shatter-proof glass, plastics, feed-cake for livestock, high quality writing paper and many other items in common use. Even the hulls (seed coats) are used as an organic dressing for soil.



## Appendix 2 – Poems by Fred

### Yesterday and To-day

There lives a fair and blue-eyed boy  
In home on rocky shore.  
His interest was in ships that passed  
By day when storms did roar.

He tried to learn to signal them,  
With flags and lights as well.  
Although he was so very small,  
He did his message tell.

As he grew up to manhood strong,  
His learning grew with him,  
And now he signals for the men  
On aeroplanes so trim.

This man of brains was not content  
To do one thing alone,  
He learned to be a pilot too,  
And round the world will roam.

Across the Timor Sea he goes,  
With comrades brave and true.  
To Keopang, Rambang, Singapore,  
Their ports of call are few.

Long hours they travel through the air,  
And many sights they see.  
Our men are pioneering now,  
A service strong and free.

My wish to them as airmen strong  
Will always be the same,  
Help and sure guidance from above  
To bring them home again.

I hope their work will bring success,  
To our dear Motherland;  
The home of our brave forefathers,  
Who were so strong and grand.

### [Untitled]

The ocean deep was dotted white,  
With ships serene and grand.  
Along our coast they'd quickly sail,  
Or quite becalmed would stand.

Time came when fewer ships were seen  
As steamboats took their place.  
They passed out lighthouse on the shore,  
Oft times with gales to face.

When help they needed from the shore,  
Code signals they would make,  
As seen by keeper on look-out,  
The message he would take.

To signal to the shore at night  
Was seldom done at all,  
Except by firing rockets bright,  
When they had need to call.

A Digby lamp was put in use,  
And messages they morsed.  
The flashing lights now could be seen,  
As orders were endorsed.

As old Grantalla made her way,  
Her Captain gave much thought,  
Of how to make a brighter light.  
Invention now he sought.

Success was his, and soon he made  
A gas-light clear and bright.  
His lamps were used along the coast,  
By all ships in the night.

Our Captain talked with his big light,  
From Cliffy, to Little Bourke.  
He and the Keeper pioneered  
This hobby and new work.

Communication to the land  
Thus simplified became,  
Enabling Captain, or his crew,  
When asked, to give their name.

This useful work was carried on,  
Till "Sparks" became renowned.  
Since then, the wireless-wave has been  
The one to claim the crown.